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MEMORIES OF BETHANY.

BY THE

REV. JOHN R. MACDUFF, D.D.

AUTHOR OF

"MORNING AND NIGHT WATCHES," "WORDS OF JESUS," "MIND OF JESUS," "FOOTSTEPS OF ST. PAUL," "FAMILY PRAYERS," "MEMORIES OF GENNESARET," "STORY OF BETHLEHEM," ETC.

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PASSAGES REFERRING TO BETHANY IN THE SACRED NARRATIVE.

I.

Earliest Notice of Bethany.

LUKE X. 38–42.—"And He entered into a certain village: and a certain woman named Martha received Him into her house. And she had a sister called Mary, which also sat at Jesus' feet, and heard His word. But Martha was cumbered about much serving, and came to Him, and said, Lord, dost Thou not care that my sister hath left me to serve alone? bid her therefore that she help me. And Jesus answered and said unto her, Martha, Martha, thou art careful and troubled about many things: But one thing is needful: and Mary hath chosen that good part, which shall not be taken away from her."

II.

Bethany in connexion with the Sickness, Death, and Resurrection of Lazarus.

JOHN XI. 1.—"Now a certain *man* was sick, *named* Lazarus, of BETHANY, the town of Mary and her sister Martha. (It was *that*

Mary which anointed the Lord with ointment, and wiped His feet with her hair, whose brother Lazarus was sick.) Therefore his sisters sent unto Him, saying, Lord, behold, he whom Thou lovest is sick. When Jesus heard *that*, He said, This sickness is not unto death, but for the glory of God, that the Son of God might be glorified thereby. Now Jesus loved Martha, and her sister, and Lazarus. When He had heard therefore that he was sick, He abode two days still in the same place where He was."

. . . . . .

"And after that He saith unto them, Our friend Lazarus sleepeth; but I go, that I may awake him out of sleep. Then said His disciples, Lord, if he sleep, he shall do well. Howbeit Jesus spake of His death: but they thought that He had spoken of taking of rest in sleep. Then said Jesus unto them plainly, Lazarus is dead. And I am glad for your sakes that I was not there, to the intent ye may believe; nevertheless, let us go unto him."

. . . . . .

"Then, when Jesus came, He found that he had *lain* in the grave four days already. (Now BETHANY was nigh unto Jerusalem, about fifteen furlongs off.) And many of the Jews came to Martha and Mary, to comfort them concerning their brother. Then Martha, as soon as she heard that Jesus was coming, went and met Him: but Mary sat *still* in the house. Then said Martha unto Jesus, Lord, if Thou hadst been here, my brother had not died. But I know, that even now, whatsoever thou wilt ask of God, God will give *it* Thee. Jesus saith unto her, Thy brother shall rise again. Martha saith unto Him, I know that he shall rise again in the resurrection at the last day. Jesus said unto her, I am the resurrection, and the life: He that believeth in Me, though he were dead, yet shall he live: And whosoever liveth, and believeth in Me, shall never die. Believest thou this? She saith unto Him, Yea, Lord: I believe that Thou art the Christ, the Son of God, which should come into the world. And when she had so said, she went her way, and called Mary her sister secretly, saying, The Master is come, and calleth for thee. As soon as she heard *that*, she arose quickly, and came unto Him. Now Jesus was not yet come into the town, but was in that place where Martha met Him. The Jews then which

were with her in the house, and comforted her, when they saw Mary, that she rose up hastily and went out, followed her, saying, She goeth unto the grave to weep there. Then when Mary was come where Jesus was, and saw Him, she fell down at His feet, saying unto Him, Lord, if Thou hadst been here, my brother had not died. When Jesus therefore saw her weeping, and the Jews also weeping which came with her, He groaned in the spirit, and was troubled, and said, Where have ye laid him? They say unto Him, Lord, come and see. Jesus wept. Then said the Jews, Behold how He loved him! And some of them said, Could not this man, which opened the eyes of the blind, have caused that even this man should not have died! Jesus therefore again groaning in Himself, cometh to the grave. It was a cave, and a stone lay upon it. Jesus said, Take ye away the stone. Martha, the sister of him that was dead, saith unto Him, Lord, by this time he stinketh: for he hath been *dead* four days. Jesus saith unto her, Said I not unto thee, that, if thou wouldest believe, thou shouldest see the glory of God? Then they took away the stone *from the place* where the dead was laid. And Jesus lifted up *His* eyes, and said, Father, I thank thee that Thou hast heard Me. And I knew that Thou hearest Me always: but because of the people which stand by I said *it*, that they may believe that Thou hast sent Me. And when He thus had spoken, he cried with a loud voice, Lazarus, come forth. And he that was dead came forth, bound hand and foot with grave-clothes; and his face was bound about with a napkin. Jesus saith unto them, Loose him, and let him go."

III.

Notices of Bethany subsequent to the Raising of Lazarus.

JOHN XII. 1–8.—"Then Jesus, six days before the Passover, came to BETHANY, where Lazarus was which had been dead, whom he raised from the dead. There they made Him a supper; and

Martha served: but Lazarus was one of them that sat at the table with Him. Then took Mary a pound of ointment of spikenard, very costly, and anointed the feet of Jesus, and wiped His feet with her hair: and the house was filled with the odour of the ointment. Then saith one of His disciples, Judas Iscariot, Simon's *son*, which should betray Him, Why was not this ointment sold for three hundred pence, and given to the poor? This he said, not that he cared for the poor; but because he was a thief, and had the bag, and bare what was put therein. Then said Jesus, Let her alone: against the day of My burying hath she kept this. For the poor always ye have with you; but Me ye have not always."

MATTHEW XXVI. 12–13.—"For in that she hath poured this ointment on my body, she did *it* for my burial. Verily I say unto you, Wheresoever this gospel shall be preached in the whole world, *there* shall also this, that this woman hath done, be told for a memorial of her."

JOHN XII. 9.—"Much people of the Jews therefore knew that He was there: and they came not for Jesus' sake only, but that they might see Lazarus also, whom he had raised from the dead."

JOHN XII. 12–15.—"On the next day much people that were come to the feast, when they heard that Jesus was coming to Jerusalem, took branches of palm trees, and went forth to meet Him, and cried, Hosanna: Blessed *is* the King of Israel that cometh in the name of the Lord. And Jesus, when He had found a young ass, sat thereon; as it is written, Fear not, daughter of Sion: behold, thy King cometh, sitting on an ass's colt."

MATTHEW XXI. 10–12.—"And when He was come into Jerusalem, all the city was moved, saying, Who is this? And the multitude said, This is Jesus the Prophet of Nazareth of Galilee. And Jesus went into the temple of God, and cast out all them that sold and bought in the temple, and overthrew the tables of the money-changers, and the seats of them that sold doves."

MARK XI. 11–15.—"And Jesus entered into Jerusalem, and into the temple: and when He had looked round about upon all things, and now the eventide was come, he went out unto BETHANY, with the twelve. And on the morrow, when they were come from Bethany, He was hungry: And seeing a fig-tree afar off having leaves, He came, if haply he might find any thing thereon: and when He came to it, He found nothing but leaves; for the time of figs was not *yet*. And Jesus answered and said unto it, No man eat fruit of thee hereafter for ever. And His disciples heard *it*. And they come to Jerusalem: and Jesus went into the temple, and began to cast out them that sold and bought in the temple, and overthrew the tables of the money-changers, and the seats of them that sold doves."

Verse 19–20.—"And when even was come, He went out of the city. And in the morning, as they passed by, they saw the fig-tree dried up from the roots."

LUKE XXIV. 50–52.—"And He led them out as far as to BETHANY; and He lifted up His hands, and blessed them. And it came to pass, while He blessed them, He was parted from them, and carried up into Heaven. And they worshipped Him, and returned to Jerusalem with great joy."

ACTS I. 9–12.—"And when He had spoken these things, while they beheld, He was taken up; and a cloud received Him out of their sight. And, while they looked stedfastly toward Heaven as He went up, behold, two men stood by them in white apparel; which also said, Ye men of Galilee, why stand ye gazing up into Heaven? this same Jesus, which is taken up from you into Heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen Him go into Heaven. Then returned they unto Jerusalem from the Mount called Olivet, which is from Jerusalem a Sabbath-day's journey."

ZECHARIAH XIV. 4.—"And His feet shall stand in that day upon the Mount of Olives, which *is* before Jerusalem on the east, and

the Mount of Olives shall cleave in the midst thereof toward the east and toward the west, *and there shall be* a very great valley; and half of the mountain shall remove toward the north, and half of it toward the south."

. . . . . .

"And it shall be in that day, *that* living waters shall go out from Jerusalem; half of them toward the former sea, and half of them toward the hinder sea: in summer and in winter shall it be. And the Lord shall be King over all the earth: in that day shall there be one Lord, and his name one."

. . . . . .

"And it shall come to pass, *that* every one that is left of all the nations which came against Jerusalem shall even go up from year to year to worship the King, the Lord of Hosts, and to keep the feast of Tabernacles."

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MEMORIES OF BETHANY.

I.

Opening Thoughts.

PLACES associated with great minds are always interesting. What a halo of moral grandeur must ever be thrown around that spot which was hallowed above all others by the Lord of glory as the scene of His most cherished earthly friendship! However holy be the memories which encircle other localities trodden by Him in the days of His flesh,—Bethlehem, with its manger cradle, its mystic star, and adoring cherubim—Nazareth, the nurturing home of His youthful affections—Tiberias, whose shores so often echoed to His

footfall, or whose waters in stillness or in storm bore Him on their bosom — the crested heights where He uttered His beatitudes—the midnight mountains where He prayed — the garden where He suffered—the hill where He died,—there is no one single resort in His divine pilgrimage on which sanctified thought loves so fondly to dwell as on the home and village of BETHANY.

Its hours of sacred converse have long ago fled. Its honoured family have slumbered for ages in their tomb. Bethany's Lord has been for centuries enthroned amid the glories of a brighter home. But though its Memories are all that remain, the place is still fragrant with His presence. The echoes of His voice—words of unearthly sweetness — still linger around it; and have for eighteen hundred years served to cheer and encourage many a fainting pilgrim in his upward ascent to the true Bethany above!

There, the Redeemer of the world proclaimed a brief but impressive Gospel. Heaven and earth seemed then to touch one another. We have the tender tones of a *Man* blended with the ineffable majesty of *God*. Hopes "full of immor-

tality" shine with their celestial rainbow-hues amid a shower of holy tears. The cancelling from our Bibles of the 11th chapter of St John would be like the blotting out of the brightest planet from the spiritual firmament. Each of its magnificent utterances has proved like a minister-ing-angel — a seraph-messenger bearing its live-coal of comfort to the broken, bleeding heart from the holiest altar which SYMPATHY (divine and human) ever upreared in a trial-world! Many has been the weary footstep and tearful eye that has hastened in thought to BETHANY—"gone to the grave of Lazarus, to weep there."

"The town of Mary and her sister Martha," then, furnishes us alike with a garnered treasury of Christian solaces, and one of the very love-liest of the Bible's domestic portraitures. If the story of Joseph and his brethren is in the Old Testament invested with surpassing interest, here is a Gospel home-scene in the New, of still deeper and tenderer pathos—a picture in which the true Joseph appears as the central figure, without any estrangements to mar its beauty. Often at other times a drapery of woe hangs over the pathway

of the Man of Sorrows. But *Bethany* is bathed in sunshine;—a sweet *oasis* in his toil-worn pilgrimage. At this quiet abode of congenial spirits he seems to have had his main "sips at the fountain of human joy," and to have obtained a temporary respite from unwearied labour and unmerited enmity. The "Lily among thorns" raised His drooping head in this Eden home! Thither we can follow Him from the courts of the Temple—the busy crowd—the lengthened journey—the miracles of mercy—the hours of vain and ineffectual pleading with obdurate hearts. We can picture Him as the inmate of a peaceful family, spirit blending with spirit in sanctified communion. We can mark the tenderness of His holy humanity. We can see how He loved, and sympathised, and wept, and rejoiced!

As the tremendous events which signalised the close of His pilgrimage drew on, still it is *Bethany* with which they are mainly associated. It was at *Bethany* the fearful visions of His cross and passion cast their shadow on His path! From its quiet palm-trees* He issued forth on His last

* *Bethany* signifies literally "*The house of dates.*"

day's journey across Mount Olivet. It was with *Bethany* in view He ascended to heaven. Its soil was the last He trod—its homes were the last on which His eye rested when the cloud received Him up into glory. The beams of the Sun of Righteousness seemed as if they loved to linger on this consecrated height.

We cannot doubt that many incidents regarding His oft sojournings there are left unrecorded. We have more than once, indeed, merely the simple announcement in the inspired narrative that He retired from Jerusalem all night to the village where His friend Lazarus resided. We dare not withdraw more of the veil than the Word of God permits. Let us be grateful for what we have of the gracious unfoldings here vouchsafed of His inner life—the comprehensive intermingling of doctrine, consolation, comfort, and instruction in righteousness. His Bethany sayings are for all time—they have "gone through all the earth"—His Bethany words "to the end of the world!" Like its own alabaster box of precious ointment, "wheresoever the Gospel is preached," there will these be held in grateful memorial.

The traveller in Palestine is to this day shewn, in a sort of secluded ravine on the eastern slope of the Mount of Olives (about fifteen furlongs or two miles from Jerusalem), a cluster of poor cottages, numbering little more than twenty families, with groups of palm-trees surrounding them, interspersed here and there with the olive, the almond, the pomegranate, and the fig.*

This ruined village bears the Arab name of El-Azirezeh — the Arabic form of the name Lazarus — and at once identifies it with a spot so sacred and interesting in Gospel story. It is described by the most recent and discerning of Eastern writers as "a wild mountain hamlet, screened by an intervening ridge from the view of the top of Olivet—perched on its open plateau of rock—the last collection of human habitations before the desert hills that reach to Jericho. . . . . High in the distance are the Peræan mountains; the foreground is the deep descent of the mountain valley."†

* "The *figs* of Bethany" are mentioned specially by the Rabbins as being subject to tithing.

† Stanley's "Sinai and Palestine."

"The fields around," says another traveller, "lie uncultivated, and covered with rank grass and wild flowers; but it is easy to imagine the deep and still beauty of this spot when it was the home of Lazarus and his sisters, Martha and Mary. Defended on the north and west by the Mount of Olives, it enjoys a delightful exposure to the southern sun. The grounds around are obviously of great fertility, though quite neglected; and the prospect to the south-east commands a magnificent view of the Dead Sea and the plains of Jordan." *

"On the horizon's verge,
The last faint tracing on the blue expanse,
Rise Moab's summits; and above the rest
One pinnacle, where, placed by Hand Divine,
Israel's great leader stood, allow'd to view,
And but to view, that long-expected land
He may not now enjoy. Below, dim gleams
The sea, untenanted by ought that lives,
And Jordan's waters thread the plain unseen.
. . . . . .
Here, hid among her trees, a village clings—
Roof above roof uprising. White the walls,
And whiter still by contrast; and those roofs,
Broad sunny platforms, strew'd with ripening grain.
Some wandering olive or unsocial fig

* Anderson.

Amid the broken rocks which bound the path
Snatches scant nurture from the creviced stone."*

Before closing these prefatory remarks, the question cannot fail to have occurred to the most unobservant reader, why the history of the Family of Bethany and the Resurrection of Lazarus, in themselves so replete with interest and instruction—the latter, moreover, forming, as it did, so notable a crisis in the Saviour's life—should have been recorded only by the Evangelist John. Strange that the other inspired penmen should have left altogether unchronicled this touching episode in sacred writ. One or other of two reasons—or both combined—we may accept as the most satisfactory explanation regarding what, after all, must remain a difficulty. John alone of the Gospel writers narrates the transactions which took place in *Judea* in connexion with the Saviour's public ministry,—the others restricted themselves mainly to the incidents and events of His *Galilean* life and journeys; at all events, till they come to the closing scene of all.† There is another reason

* Bartlett's "Walks about Jerusalem."
† Neander's "Life of Christ."

equally probable:—A wise Christian prudence, and delicate consideration for the feelings of the living, may have prevented the other Evangelists giving publicity to facts connected with their Lord's greatest miracle; a premature disclosure of which might have exposed Lazarus and his sisters to the violence of the unscrupulous persecutors of the day. They would, moreover, (as human feelings are the same in every age,) naturally shrink from violating the peculiar sacredness of domestic grief by publishing circumstantially its details while the mourners and the mourned still lingered at their Bethany home. Well did they know that that Holy Spirit at whose dictation they wrote, would not suffer "the Church of the future" to be deprived of so precious a record of divine love and power. Hence the sacred task of being the Biographer of Lazarus was consigned to their aged survivor.

When the Apostle of Patmos wrote his Gospel, as is supposed in distant Ephesus, Mary, Martha, and Lazarus were, in all likelihood, reposing in their graves. Happily so, too, for ere this the Roman armies were encamped almost within

sight of their old dwelling, and the inhabitants of Jerusalem undergoing their unparalleled sufferings.

Add to this, John, of all the Evangelists, was best qualified to do justice to this matchless picture. Baptized himself with the spirit of love, his inspired pencil could best portray the lights and shadows in this lovely and loving household. Pre-eminently like his Lord, he could best delineate the scene of all others where the tenderness of that tender Saviour shone most conspicuous. He was the disciple who had leant on His bosom—who had been admitted by Him to nearest and most confiding fellowship. He would have the Church, to the latest period of time, to enjoy the same. He interrupts, therefore, the course of his narrative that he may lift the veil which enshrouds the private life of Jesus, and exhibit Him in all ages in the endearing attitude and relation of a *Human Friend.* Immanuel is transfigured on this Mount of Love before His suffering and glory! The Bethany scene, with its tints of soft and mellowed sunlight, forms a pleasing background to the sadder and more awful events which crowd the Gospel's closing chapters.

II.

The Home Scene.

THE curtain rises on a quiet Judean village, the sanctuary of three holy hearts. Each of the inmates have some strongly-marked traits of individual character. These have been so often delicately and truthfully drawn that it is the less necessary to dwell minutely upon them here. There is abundant material in the narrative to discover to us, in the sisters, two characters—both interesting in themselves, both beloved by Jesus, both needful in the Church of God, but at the same time widely different, preparing by a diverse education for heaven—requiring, as we shall find, from Him who best knew their diversity, a separate and peculiar treatment.

Martha, the elder (probably the eldest of the family), has been accurately represented as the

type of activity; bustling, energetic, impulsive, well qualified to be the head of the household, and to grapple with the stern realities and routine of actual life; quick in apprehension, strong and vigorous in intellect, anxious to give a reason for all she did, and requiring a reason for the conduct of others; a useful if not a noble character, combining diligence in business with fervency in spirit.

Mary, again, was the type of reflection; calm, meek, devotional, contemplative, sensitive in feeling, ill suited to battle with the cares and sorrows, the strifes and griefs of an engrossing and encumbering world; one of those gentle flowers that pine and bend under the rough blasts of life, easily battered down by hail and storm, but as ready to raise its drooping leaves under heavenly influences. Her position was at her Lord's feet, drinking in those living waters which came welling up fresh from the great Fountain of life; asking no questions, declining all arguments, gentle and submissive, a beautiful impersonation of the childlike faith which "beareth all things, hopeth all things, believeth all things." While her sister can so

command her feelings as to be able to rush forth to meet her Lord outside the village, calm and self-possessed, to unbosom to Him all her hopes and fears, and even to interrogate Him about death and the resurrection, Mary can only meet Him buried in her all-absorbing grief. The crushed leaves of that flower of paradise are bathed and saturated with dewy tears. She has not a word of remonstrance. Jesus speaks to Martha—chides her—reasons with her; with Mary, He knew that the heart was too full, the wound too deep, to bear the probing of word or argument; He speaks, therefore, in the touching pathos of her own silent grief. Her melting emotion has its response in His own. In one word, Martha was one of those meteor spirits rushing to and fro amid the ceaseless activities of life, softened and saddened, but not prostrated and crushed by the sudden inroads of sorrow. Mary, again, we think of as one of those angel forms which now and then seem to walk the earth from the spirit-land; a quiet evening star, shedding its mellowed radiance among deepening twilight shadows, as if her home was in a brighter sphere, and her choice, as we know it was, "a

better part, that never could be taken from her."* Beautifully and delicately has a Christian poet thus drawn her loving character:—

"Oh, blest beyond all daughters of the East!
What were the Orient thrones to that low seat
Where thy hush'd spirit drew celestial birth!
Mary! meek listener at the Saviour's feet,
No feverish cares to that divine retreat
Thy woman's heart of silent worship brought,
But a fresh childhood, heavenly truth to meet
With love and wonder and submissive thought.
Oh! for the holy quiet of thy breast,
Midst the world's eager tones and footsteps flying,
Thou whose calm soul was like a well-spring, lying
So deep and still in its transparent rest,
That e'en when noontide burns upon the hills,
Some one bright solemn star all its lone mirror fills."

Of Lazarus, around whom the main interest of the narrative gathers, we have fewer incidental touches to guide us in giving individuality to his character. This, however, we may infer, from the poignant sorrow of the twin hearts that were so unexpectedly broken, that he was a loved and lamented only brother, a sacred prop around which their tenderest affections were entwined. Included

* "What Mary fell short in words she made up in tears. She said less than Martha, but wept more; and tears of devout affection have a voice, a loud prevailing voice—no rhetoric like that."—MATTHEW HENRY.

too, as he was, in the love which the Divine Saviour bore to the household (for "Jesus loved Lazarus"), is it presumptuous to imagine that his spirit had been cast into much the same human mould as that of his beloved Lord, and that the friendship of Jesus for him had been formed on the same principles on which friendships are formed still—a similarity of disposition, some mental and moral resemblances and idiosyncrasies? They were like-minded, so far as a fallible nature and the nature of a stainless humanity *could* be assimilated. We can think of him as gentle, retiring, amiable, forgiving, heavenly-minded; an imperfect and shadowy, it may be, but still a faithful reflection and transcript of incarnate loveliness. May we not venture to use regarding him his Lord's eulogy on another, "Behold an Israelite indeed, in whom is no guile!"

Nor must we forget, in this rapid sketch, what a precious unfolding we have in this home portraiture of the humanity of the Saviour! "*The Man* Christ Jesus" stands in softened majesty and tenderness before our view. He who had a heart capacious enough to take in all mankind, had yet

His likings (sinless partialities) for individuals and minds which were more than others congenial and kindred with His own. As there are some heart sanctuaries where we can more readily rush to bury the tale of our sorrows or unburden our perplexities, so had He. "Jesus wept!"—this speaks of Him as the human Sympathiser. "Jesus loved Lazarus"—this speaks of Him as the human Friend! He had an ardent affection for all His disciples, but even among *them* there was an inner circle of holier attachments—a Peter, and James, and John; and out of this sacred *trio* again there was one pre-eminently "Beloved." So, amid the hallowed haunts of Palestine, the homes of Judea, the cities of Galilee, there was but *one* Bethany. It is delightful thus to think of the heart of Jesus in all but sin as purely *human*, identical and identified with our own. He was no hermit-spirit dwelling in mysterious solitariness apart from His fellows, but open to the charities of life;—in all His refined and hallowed sensibilities "made like unto His brethren." Friendship is itself a holy thing. The bright intelligences in the upper sanctuary know it and experience it. They "cry

one to another." Theirs is no solitary strain—no isolated existence. Unlike the planets in the material firmament, shining distant and apart, they are rather clustering constellations, whose gravitation-law is unity and love, this binding them to one another, and all to God. Nay—with reverence we say it—may not the archetype of all friendship be found shadowed forth in what is higher still, those mystic and ineffable communings subsisting between Father, Son, and Holy Spirit in a past eternity? We can thus regard the friendship of Jesus on earth — like all ennobled, purified affections—as an emanation from the Divine; a sacred and holy rill, flowing direct from the Fountain of infinite love. How our adorable Lord in the days of His flesh fondly clung even to hearts that grew faithless when fidelity was most needed! What was it but a noble and touching tribute to the longings and susceptibilities of His holy soul for human friendship, when, on entering the precincts of Gethsemane, He thus sought to mitigate the untold sorrows of that awful hour—"Tarry *ye* here and *watch* with *Me!*"

But to return. Such was the home around which the memories of its inmates and our own love to linger.

Mary, Martha, and Lazarus—all three partakers of the same grace, fellow-pilgrims Zionward, and that journey sanctified and hallowed by a sacred fellowship with the Lord of pilgrims. The Saviour's own precious promise seems under that roof of lowly unobtrusive love to receive a living fulfilment: "Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them." Though many a gorgeous palace was at that era adorning the earth, where was the spot, what the dwelling, half so consecrated as this? Solomon had a thousand years before, two miles distant, in presence of assembled Israel, uttered the exclamation, "But will God in very deed dwell with men upon earth?" He was now verily dwelling! Nor was it under any gorgeous canopy or august temple. He had selected Three Human Souls as the shrines He most loved. He had sought their holy, heavenly converse as the sweetest incense and costliest sacrifice. How or where they first saw Jesus we cannot tell.

They had probably been among the number of those pious Jews who had prayerfully waited for the "consolation of Israel," and who had lived to see their fondest wishes and hopes realised. The Evangelist gives no information regarding their previous history. The narrative all at once, with an abruptness of surpassing beauty, leaves us in no doubt that the Divine Redeemer had been for long a well-known guest in that sunlit home, and that, when the calls and duties of His public ministry were suspended, many an hour was spent in the enjoyment of its peaceful seclusion.

We can fancy, and no more, these oft happy meetings, when the Pilgrim Saviour, weary and worn, was seen descending the rocky footpath of Olivet,—Lazarus or his sisters, from the flat roof of their dwelling, or under the spreading fig-tree, eager to catch the first glimpse of His approach.

When seated in the house, we may picture their converse: Themes of sublime and heavenly import, unchronicled by the inspired penmen, which sunk deep into those listening spirits, and nerved two of them for an after-hour of unexpected sorrow. If there be bliss in the interchange of com-

munion between Christian and Christian, what must it have been to have had the presence and fellowship of the Lord Himself! Not seeing Him, as *we* see Him, "behind the lattice," but seated underneath His shadow, drinking in the living tones of His living voice. These "children of Zion" must, indeed, have been "joyful in their King."

One of these hallowed seasons is that referred to in the 10th of St Luke, where Martha the ministering spirit, and Mary the lowly disciple, are first introduced to our notice. That visit is conjectured to have occurred when Jesus was returning to the country from the Feast of Tabernacles. The Bethany circle dreamt not then of their impending trial. But, foreseen as it was by Him who knows the end from the beginning, may we not well believe one reason (the main reason) for His going thither was to soothe them in the prospect of a saddened home? So that, when the stroke *did* descend, they might be cheered and consoled with the remembrances of His visit, and of the gracious words which proceeded out of His mouth.

And is not this still the way Jesus deals with His people? He visits them often by some precious love-tokens—some special manifestations of His grace and presence before the hour of trial. So that, when that hour *does* come, they may not be altogether prostrated or overwhelmed with it. Like Elijah of old, they have their miraculous food provided before they encounter the sterile desert. When they come to speak of their crushed hearts, they have solaces to tell of too. Their language is, "I will sing of *mercy* and *judgment!*"

We may be led to inquire why a character so lovely as that of Lazarus was not enlisted along with the other disciples in the active service of the Apostleship. Why should Peter and Andrew, John and James, be summoned from their boats and nets on Gennesaret to follow Jesus, and this other, imbued with the same spirit and honoured with the same regard, be left alone and undisturbed in his village home?

"To every man there is a work." Some are more peculiarly called to active duty, and better fitted for it; others for passive obedience and suf-

fering. Some are selected as bold standard-bearers of the cross, others to give their testimony in the quiet seclusion of domestic life. Some are specially gifted, as Paul, to appear in the halls of Nero or on the heights of Mars' Hill, and, confronting face to face the world's boasted wisdom, maintain intact the honour of their Lord. Others are required to glorify Him on beds of sickness, or in homes of sorrow, or in the holy consistent tenor of their everyday walk. Some are called as Levites to temple service; others to give the uncostly cup of cold water, or the widow's mite; others to manifest the meek, gentle, unselfish, resigned, forgiving heart, when there is no cup or mite to offer!

Believer! rejoice that your path is marked out for you. Your lot in life, with all its "accidents," is your Lord's appointing. Dream not, in your own short-sighted wisdom, that, had you occupied some other or more prominent position—had your talents been greater, or your worldly influence more extensive—you might have glorified your God in a way which is at present denied to you. He can be served in the lowliest as well as in the most exalted stations. As the tiniest leaf or

smallest star in the world of nature reflects His glory as well as the giant mountain or blazing sun, so does He graciously own and recognise the humblest effort of lowly love no less than the most lavish gifts which splendid munificence and costly devotion can cast into His treasury. Let it be your great aim and ambition to honour Him just in the position He has seen meet to assign you. "Let every man," says the Apostle, "wherein he is called, therein abide with God." However limited your sphere, you may become a centre of holy influences to the little world around you. Your heart may be an incense-altar of love and affection, kindness and gentleness to man—your life a perpetual hymn of praise to your Father in Heaven; glorifying Him, like Martha, by active service; like Mary, by sitting at His feet; or, like Lazarus, by holy living and happy dying, and leaving behind you "the Memory of the Just" which is "blessed."

III.

Lessons.

As yet the home of Bethany is all happiness. The burial-ground has been untraversed since, probably, years before the dust of one, or perhaps both parents had been committed to the sepulchre.* Death had long left the inmates an unbroken circle. Can it be that the unwelcome intruder is so nigh at hand?—that their now joyous dwelling is so soon to echo to the wail of lamentation? We imagine it but lately visited by Jesus. In a little while the arrow hath sped; the sacredness of a divine friendship is no guarantee against the incursion of the sleepless foe of human happiness. Bethany is a mourning household. The sisters are bowed in the agony of their worst bereavement—the prop of their existence is laid low—"*Lazarus is dead!*"

* *Note.*—See p. 173

At the very threshold of this touching story, are we not called on to pause, and read *the uncertainty of earth's best joys and purest happiness;* that the brightest sunshine is often the precursor of a dark cloud. When the gourd is all flourishing, a worm may unseen be preying at its root! When the vessel is gliding joyously on the calm sea, the treacherous rock may be at hand, and, in one brief hour, it has become a shattered wreck!

It is the touching record of the inspired historian in narrating Abraham's heaviest trial—"After *these things*, God did tempt Abraham." After *what* things? After a season of rich blessings, gilding a future with bright hopes!

Would that, amidst our happy homes, and sunshine hours, and seasons of holy and joyous intercourse between friend and friend, we would more habitually bear in mind "This is not to last!" In one brief and unsuspected moment Lazarus may be taken. The messenger may now be on the wing to lay low some treasured object of earthly solicitude and love. God would teach us—while we are glad of our gourds—not to be "exceeding glad;" not to nestle here as if we

were to "live alway," but rather, as we are perched on our summer boughs, to be ready at His bidding to soar away, and leave behind us what most we prize.

It tells us, too, *the utter mysteriousness of many of the divine dispensations.*

"LAZARUS IS DEAD!" What! He, the head, and support, and stay of two helpless females? The joy and solace of a common orphanhood,—a brother evidently made and born for their adversities? What! Lazarus, whom Jesus tenderly loved? How much, even to his Lord, will be buried in that early grave! We may well expect, if there be one homestead in all Palestine guarded by the overshadowing wings of angels to debar the entrance of death, whose inmates may pillow their heads night after night in the confident assurance of immunity from trial, it must surely be that loved resort—that "Arbour in His Hill Difficulty," where the God-man delighted oft to pause and refresh His wearied body and aching mind. Will Omnipotence not have set its mark, as of old, on the door-posts and lintels of that consecrated dwelling, so that the destroyer, in going his rounds

elsewhere, may pass by it unscathed? How, too, can the infant Church spare him? The aged Simeon or Anna we dare not wish to detain. Burdened with years and infirmities, after having got a glimpse of their Lord and Saviour, let them depart in peace, and receive their crowns. These decayed trees in the forest—those to whom old age on earth is a burden—let them bow to the axe, and be transplanted to a nobler clime. But one in the vigour of life—one so beautifully combining natural amiability with Christian love—one who was pre-eminently the *friend* of Jesus, and that *word* profoundly suggestive of all that was lovely in a disciple's character. Death may visit other homes in that sequestered village, and spread desolation in other hearts, but surely the Church's Lord will not suffer one of its pillars so prematurely to fall!

And yet it is even so! The mysterious summons has come! — the most honoured home on earth has been rudely rifled! — the most loving of hearts have been cruelly torn; and inscrutable is the dealing, for "*Lazarus is dead!*"

> "He, the young and strong, who cherish'd
> Noble longings for the strife,
> By the roadside fell, and perish'd
> On the threshold march of life."

And worse, too, than all, "the Lord is absent." Why is Omniscience tarrying elsewhere, when His presence and power are above all needed at the house of His friend?

The disconsolate sisters, in wondering amazement, repeat over and over again the exclamation, "If Jesus had been here, this our brother had not died!" "Hath He forgotten to be gracious?" "Surely our way is hid from the Lord, our judgment is passed over from our God."

Ah! the experience of His people is often still the same. What are many of God's dispensations? — a baffling enigma — all strangeness — all mystery to the eye of sense. *Useless* lives prolonged, *useful* ones taken! The honoured minister of God struck down, the unfaithful watchman spared! The philanthropic and benevolent have an arrest put on their manifold deeds of kindness and generosity; the grasping, the avaricious, the mean-souled—those who neither fear God nor do good to man, are suffered to live on from day

to day! What is it but the picture here presented eighteen hundred years ago—*Judas* spared to be a *traitor to his Lord*, while—*Lazarus is dead!*

But let us be still! The Saviour, indeed, does not now lead us forth, amid the scene of our trial, as He did the bereft sisters, to unravel the mysteries of His providence, and to shew glory to God, redounding from the darkest of His dispensations. To *us* the grand sequel is reserved for eternity. The grand development of the divine plan will not be fully accomplished till *then;* faith must meanwhile rest satisfied with what is baffling to sight and sense. This whole narrative is designed to teach the lesson that there is an undeveloped future in all God's dealings. There is an unseen "why and wherefore" which cannot be answered here. Our befitting attitude and language *now* is that of simple confidingness—"Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?"—Listening to one of these Bethany sayings (we shall by and by consider), whose meaning will be interpreted in a brighter world by Him who ut-

tered it in the days of His flesh—"Said I not unto thee, that if thou wouldest *believe* thou shouldest *see* the glory of God?"

> "O thou who mournest on thy way,
> With longings for the close of day,
> He walks with thee, that Angel kind,
> And gently whispers—'Be resign'd;
> Bear up—bear on—the end shall tell,
> The dear Lord ordereth all things well.'"

Our duty, meanwhile, is that of children, simply to trust the faithfulness of a God whose footsteps of love we often fail to trace. All will be seen at last to have been not only *for* the best, but really *the best.* Dark clouds will be fringed with mercy. What we call now "baffling dispensations," will be seen to be wondrous parts of a great connected whole,—the wheel within wheel of that complex machinery, by which "all things" (yes, ALL things) are now working together for good.

"Lazarus is dead!" The choicest tree in the earthly Eden has succumbed to the blast. The choicest cup has been dashed to the ground. Some great lights in the moral firmament have been extinguished. But God can do without human

agency. His Church can be preserved, though no Moses be spared to conduct Israel over Jordan, and no Lazarus to tell the story of his Saviour's grace and love, when other disciples have forsaken Him and fled.

We may be calling, in our blind unbelief, as we point to some ruined fabric of earthly bliss —some tomb which has become the grave of our fondest affections and dearest hopes—"Shall the dust praise thee, shall *it* declare thy truth?" *Believe! believe!* God will not give us back our dead as He did to the Bethany sisters; but He will not deprive us of aught we have, or suffer one garnered treasure to be removed, except for His own glory and our good. *Now* it is our province to *believe* it—in *Heaven* we shall *see* it. Before the sapphire throne we shall *see* that not one redundant thorn has been suffered to pierce our feet, or one needless sorrow to visit our dwelling, or tear to dim our eye. Then our acknowledgment will be, "We have *known* and *believed* the love which God hath to us."

"Oh, weep not though the beautiful decay,
Thy heart must have its autumn—its pale skies

Leading mayhap to winter's cold dismay.
Yet doubt not. Beauty doth not pass away;
His form departs not, though his body dies.
Secure beneath the earth the snowdrop lies,
Waiting the spring's young resurrection-day." *

Be it ours to have Jesus *with* us, and Jesus *for* us, in all our afflictions. If we wish to insure these mighty solaces, we must not suffer the hour of sorrow and bereavement to overtake us with a Saviour till *then* a stranger and unknown. St Luke tells us the secret of Mary's faith and composure at her loved one's grave:—*She had, long before her day of trial, learned to sit at her Redeemer's feet. It was when in health Jesus was first resorted to and loved.*

In prosperity may our homes and hearts be gladdened with His footstep; and when prosperity is withdrawn, and is succeeded by the dark and cloudy day, may we know, like Martha and Mary, where to rush in our seasons of bitter sorrow; listening from His glorified lips on the throne to those same exalted themes of consolation which, for eighteen hundred years, have to myriad, myriad mourners been like oil thrown on the

* "Within and Without."

troubled sea. Jesus is with us! The Master is come! His presence will extract sorrow from the bitterest cup, and make, as He did at Bethany, a very home of bereavement and a burial scene to be "hallowed ground!".

IV.

The Messenger.

Is the absent Saviour not to be sought? Martha and Mary knew the direction He had taken. The last time He had visited their home was at the Feast of Dedication, during the season of winter, when the palm-trees were bared of their leaves, and the voice of the turtle was silent. Jesus, on that occasion, had to escape the vengeance of the Jews in Jerusalem by a temporary retirement to the place where John first baptized, near Enon, on the wooded banks of the Jordan. It must have been to Him a spot and season of calm and grateful repose; a pleasing transition from the rude hatred and heartless formalism which met Him in the degenerate "City of Solemnities." The savour of the Baptist's name and spirit seemed to linger around this sequestered region.

John had evidently prepared, by his faithful ministry, the way for a mightier Preacher, for we read, as the result of the Saviour's present sojourn, that "many believed on Him there."

If we visit with hallowed emotion the places where first we learned to love the Lord, to two at least of those who accompanied the Redeemer, the region He now traversed must have been full of fragrant memories; *there* it was that Jesus had been first pointed out to them as the "Lamb of God;" *there* they first "beheld His glory, the glory as of the only-begotten of the Father, full of grace and of truth." (John i. 28.)

On His way thither, on the present occasion, He most probably passed through Bethany, and apprised His friends of His temporary absence. Lazarus was then in his wonted vigour—no shadow of death had yet passed over his brow; he doubtless parted with the Lord he loved happy at the thought of ere long meeting again.

But soon all is changed. The hand of sickness unexpectedly lays him low. At first there is no cause for anxiety. But soon the herald-symptoms of danger and death gather fast and thick around

his pillow; "his beauty consumes away like a moth." The terrible possibility for the first time flashes across the minds of the sisters, of a desolate home, and of themselves being the desolate survivors of a loved brother. The joyous dream of restoration becomes fainter and fainter. Human remedies are hopeless. There was *One*, and *only* ONE, in the wide world who could save from impending death. His word, they knew, could alone summon lustre to that eye, and bloom to that wan and fading cheek. Fifty long miles intervene between the great Physician and their cottage home. But they cannot hesitate. Some kind and compassionate neighbour is soon found ready to hasten along the Jericho road with the brief but urgent message, "*Lord! behold he whom thou lovest is sick.*" If it only reach in time, they know that no more is needed. They even indulge the expectation that their messenger may be anticipated by the Lord Himself appearing. Others might doubt His omniscience, but they knew its reality. They had the blessed conviction, that while they were seated in burning tears by that couch of sickness, there was a sympathising Being

far away marking every heart-throb of His suffering friend. Even when the stern human conviction of "no hope" was pressing upon them, "hoping against hope," they must have felt confident that He would not suffer His faithfulness now to fail. He had often proved Himself a Brother and Friend in the hour of *joy*. *Could* He fail—*can* He fail to prove Himself now a "Brother born for *adversity?*".

Although, however, thus convinced that the tale of their sorrows was known to Jesus, *a messenger is sent,—the means are employed!* They act as though He knew it *not;* as if that omniscient Saviour had been all unconscious of these hours of prolonged and anxious agony!

What a lesson is there here for *us!* God is acquainted with our every trouble; He knows (far better than we know ourselves) every pang we heave, every tear we weep, every perplexing path we tread; but the knee must be bent, the message must be taken, the prayer must ascend! It is His own appointed method,—His own consecrated medium for obtaining blessings. Jesus *may* have gone, and probably *would* have gone to

restore His friend, even though no such messenger had reached Him: We dare not limit the grace and dealings of God: He is often (blessed be His name for it!) "found of them that sought Him not." But He loves such messages as this. He loves the confiding, childlike trust of His own people, who delight in the hour of their extremity to cast their burdens upon Him, and send the winged herald of prayer to the throne of grace on which He sits.

Would that we valued, more than we do, this blessed link of communication between our souls and Heaven! More especially in our seasons of trouble, (when "vain is the help of man,") happy for us to be able implicitly to rest in the ability and willingness of a gracious Redeemer.

Prayer brings the soul near to Jesus, and fetches Jesus near to the soul. He may linger, as He did now at the Jordan, ere the answer be vouchsafed, but it is for some wise reason; and even if the answer given be not in accordance with our preconceived wishes or anxious desires, yet how comforting to have put our case and all its perplexities in His hand, saying, "I am oppressed;

undertake Thou for me! To Thee I unburden and unbosom my sorrows. I shall be satisfied whether my cup be filled or emptied. Do to me as seemeth good in Thy sight. He whom I love and whom THOU lovest is sick; the Lazarus of my earthly hopes and affections is hovering on the brink of death. That levelling blow, if consummated, will sweep down in a moment all my hopes of earthly happiness and joy. But it is my privilege to confide my trouble to Thee; to know that I have surrendered myself and all that concerns me into the hand of Him who 'considers my soul in adversity.' Yes; and should my schemes be crossed, and my fondest hopes baffled, I will feel, even in apparently *unanswered* prayers, that the Judge of all the earth has done right!"

"It is said," says Rutherford, speaking of the Saviour's delay in responding to the request of the Syrophenician woman; "It is said He *answered* not a word, but it is not said He *heard* not a word. These two differ much. Christ often heareth when He doth not answer. His not answering is an answer, and speaks thus: 'Pray on, go on and cry, for the Lord holdeth His door fast

bolted—not to keep you out, but that you may knock and knock.' "

"God delays to answer prayer," says Archbishop Usher, "because he would have more of it. If the musicians come to play at our doors or our windows, if we delight not in their music, we throw them out money presently that they may be gone. But if the music please us, we forbear to give them money, because we would keep them longer to enjoy their music. So the Lord loves and delights in the sweet words of His children, and therefore puts them off and answers them not presently."

Observe still further, in the case of these sorrowing sisters of Bethany, while in all haste and urgency they send their messenger, they do not ask Jesus to come—they dictate no procedure—they venture on no positive request—all is left to Himself. What a lesson also is there here to confide in His wisdom, to feel that His way and His will must be the best—that our befitting attitude is to lie passive at His feet—to wait His righteous disposal of us and ours—to make this the burden of our petition, "Lord, what wouldst *Thou* have

me to do?" "If it be possible let this cup pass from me, *nevertheless*, not as *I* will, but as *Thou wilt.*"

Reader! invite to your gates this celestial messenger. Make prayer a holy habit—a cherished privilege. Seek to be ever maintaining intercommunion with Jesus; consecrating life's common duties with His favour and love. Day by day ere you take your flight into the world, night by night when you return from its soiling contacts, bathe your drooping plumes in this refreshing fountain. Let prayer sweeten prosperity and hallow adversity. Seek to know the unutterable blessedness of habitual filial nearness to your Father in heaven — in childlike confidence unbosoming to Him those heart-sorrows with which no earthly friend can sympathise, and with which a stranger cannot intermeddle. No trouble is too trifling to confide to His ear—no want too trivial to bear to His mercy-seat.

"Prayer is appointed to convey
The blessings He designs to give;
Long as they live should Christians pray,
For only while they pray, they live."

V.

The Message.

THE messenger has reached — what is his message? It is a brief, but a beautiful one. "*Lord, behold he whom Thou lovest is sick.*"

No laboured eulogium—no lengthened panegyric could have described more significantly the character of the dying villager of Bethany. Four mystic words invest his name with a sacred loveliness. By one stroke of his pen the Apostle unfolds a heart-history; so that we desiderate no more—more would almost spoil the touching simplicity —"*He whom Thou lovest!*"

We might think at first the words are inverted. Can the messenger have mistaken them? Is it not more likely the message of the sisters was this:—"Go and tell Him, 'Lord, he whom *we* love,' or else, 'he who loveth *Thee* is sick?'"

Nay, it is a loftier argument by which they would stir the infinite depths of the Fountain of love! They had "known and believed the love" which the Great Redeemer bore to their brother, and they further felt assured that "loving him at the beginning, He would love him even to the end." Their love to Lazarus—(tender, unspeakably tender as it was—one of the loveliest types of human affection)—was at best an *earthly love*—finite—imperfect—fitful—changing—perishable. But the love they invoked was undying and everlasting, superior to all vacillation—enduring as eternity.

It is ours "to take encouragement in prayer from God only;"—to plead nothing of our own—our poor devotedness, or our unworthy services; they are rather arguments for our condemnation;—but *His* promises are all "Yea, and amen." They never fail. His name is "a strong tower," running into which the righteous are safe. That tower is garrisoned and bulwarked by the attributes of His own everlasting nature. Among these attributes not the least glorious is His *Love—that* unfathomable love which dwelt in His bosom from all

eternity, and which is immutably pledged never to be taken from His people!

Man's love to his God is like the changing sand —*His* is like the solid rock. Man's love is like the passing meteor with its fitful gleam. *His* like the fixed stars, shining far above, clear and serene, from age to age, in their own changeless firmament.

Do we know anything of the words of this message? Could it be written on our hearts in life? Were we to die, could it be inscribed on our tombs, "This is one whom *Jesus loved?*"

Happy assurance! The pure spirits who bend before the throne know no happier. The archangels—the chieftains among principalities and powers, can claim no higher privilege, no loftier badge of glory!

Love is the atmosphere they breathe. It is the grand moral law of gravitation in the heavenly economy. God, the central sun of light, and joy, and glory, keeping by this great motive principle every spiritual planet in its orbit, "for *God is love.*"

That love is not confined to heaven. It may be foretasted here. The sick man of Bethany

knew of it, and exulted in it. Though in the moment of dissolution he had to mourn the personal absence of his Lord, yet "believing" in that love, he "rejoiced with joy unspeakable and full of glory." His sisters, as they stood in sorrowing emotion by his dying couch, and thought of that hallowed fraternal bond which was about so soon to be dissolved, could triumph in the thought of an affection nobler and better which knit him and them to the Brother of brothers—and which, unlike any earthly tie, was indissoluble.

And what was experienced in that lowly Bethany home, may be experienced by us.

That love in its wondrous manifestation is confined to no limits, no age, no peculiar circumstances. Many a Lazarus, pining in want, who can claim no heritage but poverty, no home but cottage walls, or who, stretched on a bed of protracted sickness, is heard saying in the morning, "Would God it were evening! and in the evening, Would God it were morning!" if he have that love reigning in his heart, he has a possession outweighing the wealth of worlds!

What a message, too, of consolation is here to

the *sick!* How often are those chained down year after year to some aching pillow, worn, weary, shattered in body, depressed in spirit,—how apt are they to indulge in the sorrowful thought, "Surely God cannot care for *me!*" What! Jesus think of this wasted frame — these throbbing temples — these powerless limbs — this decaying mind! I feel like a wreck on the desert shore— beyond the reach of His glance — beneath the notice of His pitying eye! Nay, thou poor desponding one, He *does* cherish, He *does* remember thee! — "Lord, *he whom Thou lovest* is sick." Let this motto-verse be inscribed on thy Bethany chamber. The Lord *loves* His sick ones, and He often chastens them with sickness, just *because* He loves them. If these pages be now traced by some dim eyes that have been for long most familiar with the sickly glow of the night-lamp —the weary vigils of pain and languor and disease —an exile from a busy world, or a still more unwilling alien from the holy services of the sanctuary—oh! think of Him who *loves* thee, who loved thee *into* this sickness, and will love thee *through* it, till thou standest in that unsuffering,

unsorrowing world, where sickness is unknown! Think of Lazarus in *his* chamber, and the plea of the sisters in behalf of their prostrate brother, "Lord, come to the sick one, *whom Thou lovest.*"

Believe it, the very continuance of this sickness is a pledge of His love. You may be often tempted to say with Gideon, "If the Lord be with me, why has *all* this befallen me?" Surely if my Lord loved me, He would long ere this have hastened to my relief, rebuked this sore disease, and raised me up from this bed of languishing? Did you ever note, in the 6th verse of this Bethany chapter, the strangely beautiful connexion of the word THEREFORE? The Evangelist had, in the preceding verse, recorded the affection Jesus bore for that honoured family. "Now Jesus *loved* Martha and her sister and Lazarus." "When He had heard THEREFORE that he was sick,"—what did He do? "Fled on wings of love to the succour of His loved friend; hurried in eager haste by the shortest route from Bethabara?" We expect to hear so, as the natural deduction from John's premises. How we might think could love give a more truthful exponent of its reality than

hastening instantaneously to the relief of one so dear to Him? But not so! "When He had heard THEREFORE that he was sick, *He abode two days still in the same place where He was!*" Yes, there is *tarrying* love as well as *succouring* love. He *sent* that sickness because He loves thee; He *continues* it because He loves thee. He heaps fresh fuel on the furnace-fires till the gold is refined. He appoints, not one, but "many days where neither sun nor stars appear, and no small tempest lies on us," that the ship may be lightened, and faith exercised; our bark hastened by these rough blasts nearer shore, and the Lord glorified, who rules the raging of the sea. "We expect," says Evans, "the blessing or relief in *our* way; He chooses to bestow it in *His*."

Reader! let this ever be your highest ambition, to love and to be loved of Jesus. If we are covetous to have the regard and esteem of the great and good on earth, what is it to share the fellowship and kindness of Him, in comparison with whose love the purest earthly affection is but a passing shadow!

Ah! to be without that love, is to be a little

world ungladdened by its central sun, wandering on in its devious pathway of darkness and gloom. Earthly things may do well enough when the world is all bright and shining—when prosperity sheds its bewitching gleam around you, and no symptoms of the cloudy and dark day are at hand; but the hour is coming (it may come soon, it *must* come at some time) when your Bethany-home will be clouded with deepening death-shadows—when, like Lazarus, you will be laid on a dying couch, and what will avail you then? Oh, nothing, *nothing!* if bereft of that love whose smile is heaven. If you are left in the agony of desolation to utter importunate pleadings to an *Unknown Saviour*, a *Stranger God*—if the dark valley be entered uncheered by the thought of a loving Redeemer dispelling its gloom, and waiting on the Canaan side to shew you the path of life!

Let the home of your hearts be often open, as was the home of Lazarus, to the visits of Jesus in the day of brightness; and *then*, when the hour of sorrow and trial unexpectedly arises, you will know where to find your Lord—where to send your prayer-message for Him to come to your relief.

Yes! He *will* come! It will be in His own way, but His joyous footfall *will* be heard! He is not like Baal, "slumbering and sleeping, or taking a journey" when the voice of importunate prayer ascends from the depths of yearning hearts! If, instead of at once hastening back to Bethany, He "abides still for two days where He was"—if He linger among the mountain-glens of distant Gilead, instead of, as we would expect, hastening to the cry and succour of cherished friendship, and to ward off the dart of the inexorable foe—be assured there must be a reason for this strange procrastination — there must be an unrevealed cause which the future will in due time disclose and unravel. All the recollections of the past forbid one unrighteous surmise on His tried faithfulness. "*Now, Jesus loved Lazarus,*" is a soft pillow on which to repose; — raising the sorrowing spirit above the unkind insinuation, "My Lord hath forsaken me, and my God hath forgotten me."

If He linger, it is to try and test the faith of His people. If He let loose the storm, and suffer it to sweep with a vengeance apparently uncontrolled, it is that these living trees may strike

their roots firmer and deeper in Himself — the Rock of eternal ages. Trust Him where you cannot trace Him. Not one promise of His can come to nought. The channel may have continued long dry—the streams of Lebanon may have failed — the cloud has been laden, but no shower descends—the barren waste is unwatered —the windows of heaven seem hopelessly closed. Nay, nay! Though "the vision tarry," yet if you "wait for it" the gracious assurance will be fulfilled in your experience—"The Lord is good to them that wait for Him, to the soul that seeketh Him." The fountain of love pent up in His heart will in due time gush forth—the apparently unacknowledged prayer will be crowned with a gracious answer. In His own good time sweet tones of celestial music will be wafted to your ear —"It is the voice of the Beloved!—lo, He cometh leaping upon the mountains, skipping upon the hills!" If you are indeed the child of God, as Lazarus was, remember this for your comfort in your dying hour, that whether the prayers of sorrowing friends for your recovery be answered or no, the Lord of love has at least *heard* them—the

messenger has not been mocked—the prayer-message has not been spurned or forgotten! I repeat it, He *will* answer, but it will be *in His own way!* If the Bethany-home be ungladdened by Lazarus restored, it will exult through tears in the thought of Lazarus glorified. And the Marthas and Marys, as they go often unto the grave to weep there, will read, as they weep, in the holy memories of the departed, that which will turn tears into joy—"*Jesus loved him.*"

VI.

The Sleeper.

"*Our friend Lazarus sleepeth.*"—The hopes and fears which alternately rose and fell in the bosoms of the sisters, like the surges of the ocean, are now at rest. Oft and again, we may well believe, had they gone, like the mother of Sisera, to the lattice to watch the return of the messenger, or, what was better, to hail their expected Lord. Gazing on the pale face at their side, and remembering that ere now the tidings of his illness must have reached Bethabara, they may have even expected to witness the power of a distant *word;*—to behold the hues of returning health displacing the ghastly symptoms of dissolution. But in vain! The curtain has fallen! Their season of aching anxiety is at an end. Their worst fears are realised.—" Lazarus sleepeth."

How calm, how tranquil that departure! Never did sun sink so gently in its crimson couch — never did child, nestling in its mother's bosom, close its eyes more sweetly!

> "His summon'd breath went forth as peacefully
> As folds the spent rose when the day is done."

Befitting close to a calm and noiseless existence! It would seem as if the guardian angels who had been hovering round his death-pillow had well-nigh reached the gates of glory ere the sorrowing survivors discovered that the clay tabernacle was all that was left of a "brother beloved!"

From the abrupt manner in which, in the course of the narrative, our Lord makes the announcement to His disciples,* we are almost led to surmise that He did so at the very moment of the spirit's dismissal—the Redeemer speaks while the eyelids are just closing, and the emancipated soul is winging its arrowy flight up to the spirit-land!

Death a SLEEP! — How beautiful the image! Beautifully true, and *only* true regarding the Christian. It is here where the true and the false—

* John xi. 11.

Christianity and Paganism—meet together in impressive and significant contrast. The one comes to the dark river with her pale, sickly lamp. It refuses to burn — the damps of Lethe dim and quench it. Philosophy tries to discourse on death as a "stern necessity" — of the duty of passing heroically into this mysterious, oblivion-world—taking with bold heart "the leap in the dark," and confronting, as we best can, blended images of annihilation and terror.

The Gospel takes us to the tomb, and shews us Death vanquished, and the Grave spoiled. Death truly is in itself an unwelcome messenger at our door. It is the dark event in this our earth, —the deepest of the many deep shadows of an otherwise fair creation—a cold, cheerless avalanche lying at the heart of humanity, freezing up the gushing fountains of joyous life. But the Gospel shines, and the cold iceberg melts. The Sun of Righteousness effects what philosophy, with all its boasted power, never could. Jesus is the abolisher of Death. He has taken all that is terrible from it. It is said of some venomous insects that when they once inflict a sting, they

are deprived of any future power to hurt. Death left his envenomed sting in the body of the great Victim of Calvary. It was thenceforward disarmed of its fearfulness! So complete, indeed, is the Redeemer's victory over this last enemy, that He Himself speaks of it as no longer a reality, but a shadow — a phantom-foe from which we have nothing to dread. "Whosoever believeth in Me shall *never die.*" "If a man keep My sayings, he shall *never see death.*" These are an echo of the sweet Psalmist's beautiful words, a transcript of his expressive figure when he pictures the Dark Valley to the believer as the Valley of a "*shadow.*" The substance is removed! When the gaunt spirit meets him on the midnight waters, he may, like the disciples at first, be led to "cry out for fear." But a gentle voice of love and tenderness rebukes his dread, and calms his misgivings —"It is I! be not afraid!" Yes, here is the wondrous secret of a calm departure—the "sleep" of the believer in death. It is the name and presence of JESUS. There may be many accompaniments of weakness and prostration, pain and suffering, in that final conflict; the mind may be a wreck—

memory may have abdicated her seat—the loving salutation of friends may be returned only with vacant looks, and the hand be unable to acknowledge the grasp of affection—but there is strength in that presence, and music in that name to dispel every disquieting, anxious thought. Clung to as a sheet-anchor in life, He will never leave the soul in the hour of dissolution to the mercy of the storm. Amid sinking nature, He is faithful that promised—"Lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world."—"Thou art with me," says Lady Powerscourt—"this is the rainbow of light thrown across the valley, for there is no need of sun or moon where covenant-love illumes."

A Christian's death-bed! It is indeed "good to be there." The man who has not to seek a living Saviour at a dying hour, but who, long having known His preciousness, loved His Word, valued His ordinances, sought His presence by believing prayer, has now nothing to do but to die (to *sleep*), and wake up in glory everlasting! "Oh! that all my brethren," were among Rutherford's last words, "may know what a Master I have served,

and what peace I have this day. This night shall close the door, and put my anchor within the veil." "This must be the chariot," said Helen Plumtre, making use of Elijah's translation as descriptive of the believer's death; "This must be the chariot; oh, how easy it is!" "Almost well," said Richard Baxter, when asked on his deathbed how he did.

Yes! there is speechless eloquence in such a scene. The figure of a quiet slumber is no hyperbole, but a sober verity. As the gentle smile of a foretasted heaven is seen playing on the marble lips—the rays gilding the mountain tops after the golden sun has gone down—what more befitting reflection than this, "*So* giveth He His beloved SLEEP!"

> "Sweetly remembering that the parting sigh
> Appoints His saints to slumber, not to die,
> The starting tear we check—we kiss the rod,
> And not to earth resign them, but to God."

Or shall we leave the death-chamber and visit the grave? Still it is a place of *sleep;* a bed of rest—a couch of tranquil repose—a quiet dormitory "until the day break," and the night shadows of earth "flee away." The dust slumbering there

is precious because redeemed; the angels of God have it in custody; they encamp round about it, waiting the mandate to "gather the elect from the four winds of heaven—from the one end of heaven to the other." Oh, wondrous day, when the long dishonoured casket shall be raised a "glorified body" to receive once more the immortal jewel, polished and made meet for the Master's use! See how Paul clings, in speaking of this glorious resurrection period, to the expressive figure of his Lord before him—"Them also which SLEEP in Jesus will God bring with Him!" *Sleep in Jesus!* His saints fall asleep on their death-couch in His arms of infinite love. There their spirits repose, until the body, "sown in corruption" shall be "raised in incorruption," and both reunited in the day of His appearing, become "a crown of glory in the hand of the Lord, and a royal diadem in the hand of their God."

Weeping mourner! Jesus dries thy tears with the encouraging assurance, "Thy dead shall live; together with My body they shall arise." Let thy Lazarus "sleep on now and take his rest;" the time will come when My voice shall be heard proclaim-

ing, "Awake, and sing, ye that dwell in dust." "The winter is past, the rain is over and gone, the flowers appear on the earth; the time of the singing of birds is come, and the voice of the turtle is heard in the land. Arise, my love, my fair one, and come away." "Weep not! he is not dead, but sleepeth. Soon shall the day-dawn of glory streak the horizon, and then I shall go that I may awake him out of sleep!"

Beautifully has it been said, "Dense as the gloom is which hangs over the mouth of the sepulchre, it is the spot, above all others, where the Gospel, if it enters, shines and triumphs. In the busy sphere of life and health, it encounters an active antagonist—the world confronts it, aims to obscure its glories, to deny its claims, to drown its voice, to dispute its progress, to drive it from the ground it occupies. But from the mouth of the grave the world retires; it shrinks from the contest there; it leaves a clear and open space in which the Gospel can assert its claims and unveil its glories without opposition or fear. There the infidel and worldling look anxiously around—but the world has left them helpless, and fled. There

the Christian looks around, and lo! the angel of mercy is standing close by his side. The Gospel kindles a torch which not only irradiates the valley of the shadow of death, but throws a radiance into the world beyond, and reveals it peopled with the sainted spirits of those who have died in Jesus."

Reader! may this calm departure be yours and mine. "Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord. . . . . They REST." All life's turmoil and tossing is over; they are anchored in the quiet haven. *Rest*—but not the rest of annihilation—

> "Grave! the guardian of our dust;
> Grave! the treasury of the skies;
> Every atom of thy trust
> Rests in hope again to rise!"

Let us seek to have the eye of faith fixed and centred on Jesus *now*. It is *that* which alone can form a peaceful pillow in a dying hour, and enable us to rise superior to all its attendant terrors. Look at that scene in the Jehoshaphat valley! The proto-martyr Stephen has a pillow of thorns for his dying couch, showers of stones are hurled by infuriated murderers on his guiltless head, yet, nevertheless, he "fell asleep." What

was the secret of that calmest of sunsets amid a blood-stained and storm-wreathed sky? The eye of faith (if not of sight) pierced through those clouds of darkness. Far above the courts of the material temple at whose base he lay, he beheld, in the midst of the general assembly and Church of the First-born of Heaven, "JESUS standing at the right hand of God." The vision of his Lord was like a celestial lullaby stealing from the inner sanctuary. With *Jesus*, his last sight on earth and his next in glory, he could "lay him down in peace and sleep," saying, in the words of the sweet singer of Israel, "What time I awake I am still with Thee."

> "It matters little at what hour o' the day
> The righteous falls asleep. Death cannot come
> To him untimely who is fit to die.
> The less of this cold world the more of heaven;
> The briefer life, the earlier immortality."—MILMAN.

"Our friend Lazarus sleepeth." This tells us that Christ forgets not the dead. The dead often bury their dead, and remember them no more. The name of their silent homes has passed into a proverb, "The land of forgetfulness." But

they are not forgotten by Jesus. That which sunders and dislocates all other ties—wrenching brother from brother, sister from sister, friend from friend—cannot sunder us from the living, loving heart on the throne of heaven. His is a friendship and love stronger than death, and surviving death. While the language of earth is

> "Friend after friend departs—
> Who hath not lost a friend?"

the emancipated spirit, as it wings its magnificent flight among the ministering seraphim, can utter the challenge, "Who shall separate me from the love of Christ?" The righteous are had with Him "in everlasting remembrance." Their names "written among the living in Jerusalem;" yea, "engraven on the palms of His hands."

One other thought.—Jesus had at first kindly and considerately disguised from His disciples the stern truth of Lazarus' departure. "Our friend sleepeth." "They thought that He had spoken of taking of rest in sleep." They understood it as the indication of the crisis-hour in sickness when the disease has spent itself, and is succeeded by a balmy slumber—the presage of returning health;

but now He says unto them plainly, "Lazarus is dead." How gently He thus breaks the sad intelligence! And it is His method of dealing still. He *prepares* His people for their hours of trial. He does not lay upon them more than they are able to bear. He considers their case—He teaches by slow and gradual discipline, leading on step by step; staying His rough wind in the day of His east wind. As the Good Physician, He metes out drop by drop in the bitter cup—as the Good Shepherd, His is not rough driving, but gentle guiding from pasture to pasture. "He leadeth them out;" "He goeth before them." He is Himself their sheltering rock in the "dark and cloudy day." The sheep who are inured to the hardships of the mountain, He leaves at times to wrestle with the storm; but "the *lambs*" (the young, the faint, the weak, the weary) "He gathers in His arms and carries in His bosom." He speaks in gentle whispers. He uses the pleasing symbol of quiet slumber before He speaks plainly out the mournful reality, "Lazarus is dead." Truly "He knoweth our frame—He remembereth that we are dust." "Like as a father pitieth his

children, so the Lord pitieth them that fear Him!"

But let us resume our narrative, and follow the journey of the dead man's "Friend." It is a mighty task He has undertaken; to storm the strong enemy in his own citadel, and roll back the barred gates! In mingled majesty and tenderness He hastens to the bereft and desolate home on this mission of power and love. We left the sisters wondering at His mysterious delay. Again and again had they imagined that at last they heard His tardy step, or listened to His hand on the latch, or to the loving music of His longed-for voice. But they are mistaken; it was only the beating of the vine-tendrils on the lattice, or the footfall of the passer by. The Lord is still absent! Their earnest and importunate heart-breathings are expressed by the Psalmist—"O Lord our God, early do we seek Thee: our soul thirsteth for Thee, our flesh longeth for Thee in a dry and thirsty land, where no water is; to see Thy power and Thy glory, as we *have* seen Thee." Be still, afflicted ones! He is coming. He will, however, let the cup of anguish be first filled to

the brim that He may manifest and magnify all the more the might of His omnipotence, and the marvels of His compassion. The thirsty land is about to become streams of water. The sky is at its darkest, when, lo! the rainbow of love is seen spanning the firmament, and a shower of blessings is about to fall on the "*Home of Bethany!*"

VII.

Lights and Shadows.

THE sounds of lamentation had now been heard for four days in the desolate household.

In accordance with general wont, the friends and relatives of the deceased had assembled to pay their tribute of respect to the memory of a revered friend, and to solace the hearts of the disconsolate survivors. They needed all the sympathy they received. It was now the dull dead calm after the torture of the storm, the leaden sea strewn with wrecks, enabling them to realise more fully the extent of their loss. Amid the lulls of the tempest, while Lazarus yet lived, hope shrunk from entertaining gloomy apprehensions. But now that the storm has spent its fury, now that the worst has come, the future rises up before them crowded with ten thousand images

of desolation and sorrow. The void in their household is daily more and more felt. All the past bright memories of Bethany seem to be buried in a yawning grave.

We may picture the scene. The stronger and more resolute spirit of Martha striving to stem the tide of overmuch sorrow. The more sensitive heart of Mary, bowed under a grief too deep for utterance, able only to indicate by her silent tears the unknown depths of her sadness.

Thus are they employed, when Martha, unseen to her sister, has been beckoned away. "*The Master has come.*" But desirous of ascertaining the truth of the joyful tidings, ere intruding on the grief of Mary, the elder of the survivors rushes forth with trembling emotion to give full vent to her sorrow at the feet of the Great Friend of all the friendless! *

He has not yet entered the village. She cannot, however, wait His arrival. Leaving home and sepulchre behind, she hastens outside the groves of palm at its gate.

It requires no small fortitude in the season of

* John xi. 20.

sore bereavement to face an altered world; and, doubtless, passing all alone now through the little town, meeting familiar faces wearing sunny smiles which could not be returned, must have been a painful effort to this child of sorrow. But what will the heart not do to meet such a Comforter? What will Martha be unprepared to encounter if the intelligence brought her be indeed confirmed? One glance is enough. "*It is the Lord!*" In a moment she is a suppliant at His feet. Doubt and faith and prayer mingle in the exclamation, "Lord, if Thou hadst been here, my brother had not died!" *

That she had faith and assured confidence in the love and tenderness of Jesus we cannot question. But a momentary feeling of unbelief (shall we say, of reproach and upbraiding?) mingled with better emotions. "Why, Lord," seemed to be the expression of her inner thoughts, "wert Thou absent? It was unlike Thy kind heart. Thou hast often gladdened our home in our season of joy—why this forgetfulness in the night of our bitter agony? Death has torn from us a loved

* John xi. 21.

brother—the blow would have been spared—these hearts would have been unbroken—these burning tears unshed, if *Thou hadst* been here!"

Such was the bold—the *unkind* reasoning of the mourner. It was the reasoning of a finite creature. Ah! if she could but have looked into the workings of that infinite Heart she was ungenerously upbraiding, how differently would she have broached her tearful suit!

Her exclamation is—"Why this *unkind* absence?"

His comment on that *same* absence to His disciples is *this*—"I was *glad* for your sakes that I was *not* there!"

How often are *God* and *man* thus in strange antagonism, with regard to earthly dispensations! Man, as he arraigns the rectitude of the Divine procedure, exclaiming—"How unaccountable this dealing! How baffling this mystery! Where is now my God?" This sickness—why prolonged? This thorn in the flesh—why still buffeting? This family blank—why permitted? Why the most treasured and useful life taken—the blow aimed where it cut most severely and levelled lowest?

Hush the secret atheism! This trial, whatever it be, has this grand motto written upon it in characters of living light;—we can read it on anguished pillows—aching hearts—ay, on the very portals of the tomb—"*This* is for the glory of God, that the Son of God may be glorified thereby!"

At the very moment we are mourning what are called "*dark* providences"—"untoward calamities"—"strokes of misfortune"—"unmitigated evils"—Jesus has a different verdict;—"I am *glad* for your sakes."

The absence at Jordan—the still more unaccountable lingering for two days in the same place after the message had been sent, instead of hastening direct to Bethany, all was well and wisely ordered. And although Martha's upbraidings were now received in forbearing silence, her Saviour afterwards, in a calmer moment, read the rebuke—"Said I not unto thee, if thou wouldst *believe*, thou shouldst see the glory of God?"

It is indeed a comforting assurance in all trials, that God has some holy and wise end to subserve. He never stirs a ripple on the waters,

but for His own glory, or the good of others. The delay on the present occasion, though protracting for a time the sorrows of the bereaved, was intended for the benefit of the Church in every age, and for the more immediate benefit of the disciples.

They were destined in a few brief weeks also to be desolate survivors—to mourn a Brother dearer still! He who had been to them Friend—Father—Brother, all in one, was to be, like Lazarus, laid silent in a Jerusalem sepulchre. The Lord of Life was to be the victim of Death! His body was to be transfixed to a malefactor's cross, and consigned to a lonely grave! He knew the shock that awaited their faith. He knew, as this terrible hour drew on, how needful some overpowering visible demonstration would be of His mastery over the tomb.

Now a befitting opportunity occurred in the case of their friend Lazarus to read the needed lesson. "I was glad for your sakes, . . . to the intent ye might believe."

Would that we could feel as believers more than we do — that the dealings of our God are

for the strengthening of our faith, and the enlivening and invigorating of our spiritual graces. Let us seek to accept more simply in dark dealings the Saviour's explanation, "It is for *your* sake!" He gives us a blank for our every trial, indorsing it with His own gracious word, "This, *this* is for the glory of God, that the Son of God may be glorified thereby."

The words of Martha, then, surely teach as their great lesson, never to be hasty in our surmises and conclusions regarding God's ways.

"Lord! IF Thou *hadst* been here?" Could she question for a moment that that loving eye of Omniscience had all the while been scanning that sick-chamber—marking every throb in that fevered brow—and every tear that fell unbidden from the eyes that watched his pillow?

"Lord! *if* Thou hadst been here?" Could she question His ability, had He so willed it, to prevent the bereavement altogether—to put an arrest on the hand of death ere the bow was strung?

O faithless disciple, wherefore didst thou doubt? But thou art ere long to learn what each of us

will learn out in eternity, that "*all* things are for our sakes, that the abundant grace might, through the thanksgiving of many, redound *to the glory of God.*"

But the momentary cloud has passed. Faith breaks through. The murmur of upbraiding has died away. He who listens makes allowance for an anguished heart. The glance of tender sympathy and gentleness which met Martha's eye, at once hushes all remains of unbelief. Words of exulting confidence immediately succeed. "But I know that even now whatsoever Thou wilt ask of God, God will give it Thee."

What is this, but that which every believer exults in to this hour, as the sheet-anchor of hope and peace and comfort, when tossed on a tempestuous sea — a gracious confidence in the ability and willingness of Christ to save. The Friend of Bethany is still the Friend in Heaven. To Him "all power has been committed;" "as a prince He has power with God, and must prevail."

Yes, gracious antidote to the spirit in the moment of its trial; when bowed down with

anticipated bereavement; the curtains of death about to fall over life's brightest joys. How blessed to lay hold on the *perfect* conviction that "the Ever-living Intercessor in glory has all power to revoke the sentence if He sees meet" —that even *now* (yes *now*, in a moment) the delegated angel may be sent speeding from his throne, to spare the tree marked to fall, and prolong the lease of existence!

Let us rejoice in the power of this God-man Mediator, that He is as able as He is willing, and as willing as He is able. "Him the Father heareth always." "*Father, I will,*" is His own divine *formula* for every needed boon for His people.

How it ought to make our sick-chambers and death-chambers consecrated to prayer! leading us to make our every trial and sorrow a fresh reason for going to God. Laying our burden, whatever it may be, on the mercy-seat, it will be *considered* by Him, who is too wise to grant what is better to be withdrawn, and too kind to withhold what, without injury to us, may be granted.

Let us imitate Martha's faith in our approaches

to Him. Ah, in our dull and cold devotions, how little lively apprehension have we of the gracious *willingness* of Christ to listen to our petitions! Standing as the great Angel of the Covenant with the golden censer, His hand never shortened—His ear never heavy—His uplifted arm of intercession never faint. No variety bewildering Him—no importunity wearying Him—"waiting to be gracious" —loving the music of the suppliant spirit.

Would that we had ever before us as the superscription of faith written on our closet-devotions, and domestic altars, and public sanctuaries, *whenever* and *wherever* the knee is bent, and the Hearer of prayer is invoked—"I *know* that even *now* whatsoever *Thou* wilt ask of God, God will give it Thee."

VIII.

The Mourner's Comfort.

MARTHA'S tearful utterances are now met with an exalted solace.

"*Thy brother shall rise again.*" It is the first time her Lord has spoken. She now once more hears those well-remembered tones which were last listened to, when life was all bright, and her home all happy.

It is the self-same consolation which steals still, like celestial music, to the smitten heart, when every chord of earthly gladness ceases to vibrate. And it is befitting too that *Jesus* should utter it. He alone is qualified to do so. The words spoken to the bereaved one of Bethany are words purchased by His own atoning work. "Thy brother —thy sister—thy friend, shall rise again!"

This brief oracle of comfort was addressed, in

the first instance, specially to Martha. It had a primary reference, doubtless, to the vast miracle which was on the eve of performance. But there were more hearts to comfort and souls to cheer than one; that Almighty Saviour had at the moment troops of other bereaved ones in view; myriads on myriads of aching, bleeding spirits who could not, like the Bethany mourner, rush into His visible presence for consolation and peace. He expands, therefore, for their sakes the sublime and exalted solace which He ministers to *her*. And in words which have carried their echoes of hope and joy through all time, He exclaims—"I am the resurrection and the life; he that believeth on Me, though he were dead, yet shall he live; and whosoever liveth and believeth on Me shall never die!"

If Bethany had bequeathed no other "memory" than *this*, how its name would have been embalmed in hallowed recollection! Truly these two brief verses are as apples of gold in pictures of silver. "*Jesus, the Resurrection and the Life.*" Himself conquering death, He has conquered it for His people—opening the kingdom of heaven to all believers.

The full grandeur of that Bethany utterance could not be appreciated by her to whom it was first spoken. His death and resurrection was still, even to His nearest disciples, a profound mystery. Little did that trembling spirit, who was now gazing on her living Lord with tearful eye, dream that in a few brief days the grave was to hold HIM, too, as its captive; and that guardian angels were to proclaim words which would now have been all enigma and strangeness, "The Lord is risen!" With us it is different. The mighty deed has been completed. "Christ has died; yea, rather has risen again!" The resurrection and revival of Lazarus was a marvellous act, but it was only the rekindling of a little star that had ceased to twinkle in the firmament. A week more—and Martha would witness the Great Sun of all Being undergoing an eclipse; in a mysterious moment veiled and shrouded in darkness and blood; and then all at once coming forth like a Bridegroom from his chamber to shine the living and luminous centre of ransomed millions!

Christians! we can turn now aside and see this

great sight—death closing the lips of the Lord of life—a borrowed grave containing the tenantless body of the Creator of all worlds! Is death to hold that prey? Is the grave to retain in gloomy custody that immaculate frame? Is the living temple to lie there an inglorious ruin, like other crumbling wrecks of mortality? The question of our eternal life or eternal death was suspended on the reply! If death succeeds in chaining down the illustrious Victim, our hopes of everlasting life are gone for ever. In vain can these dreary portals be ever again unbarred for the children of fallen humanity. He has gone there as their surety-Saviour. If his suretyship be accepted—if He meet and fulfil all the requirements of an outraged law, the gates of the dismal prison-house will and must be opened. If, on the other hand, there be any flaw or deficiency in His person or work as the Kinsman-Redeemer, then no power can snap the chains which bind Him; the tomb will refuse to surrender what it has in custody; the hopes of His people must perish along with Him! Golgotha must become the grave of a world's hopes!

But the stone *has* been rolled away. The grave-clothes are all that are left as trophies of the conqueror. Angels are seated in the vacant tomb to verify with their gladdening assurance His own Bethany oracle, "The Lord has risen." "He is indeed the resurrection and the life; he that liveth and believeth on Him shall never die!"

Yes! however many be the comforting thoughts which cluster around the grave of Lazarus, grander still is it to gather, as Jesus Himself here bids us, around His own tomb, and to gaze on His own resurrection scene! It was the most eventful morning of all time. It will be the focus point of the Church's hope and triumph through all eternity.

"The Lord is risen!" It proclaimed the atonement complete, sin pardoned, mediation accepted, the law satisfied, God glorified! "The Lord is risen!" It proclaimed resurrection and life for His people—life (the forfeited *gift* of life) now repurchased. That mighty victor rose not for Himself, but as the representative and earnest of countless multitudes, who exult in His death as their life—in His resurrection as the pledge and guarantee of

their everlasting safety;—"I am He that liveth," and "because I live ye shall live also."

Anticipating His own glorious rising, He might well speak to Martha, standing before Him as the representative of weeping, sinful, woe-worn humanity, "He that liveth and believeth on Me shall never die." "*In Me*, death is no longer death; it is only a parenthesis in life—a transition to a loftier stage of being. *In Me*, the grave is the vestibule of heaven, the robing-room of immortality!"

Reader, yours is the same strong consolation. "Believe," "Only believe" in that risen Lord. He has purchased all, paid all, procured all! Look into that vacant tomb; see sin cancelled, guilt blotted out, the law magnified, justice honoured, the sinner saved!

Ay, and more than that, as you see the moral conqueror marching forth clothed with immortal victory, you see Him not alone! He is heading and heralding a multitude which no man can number. Himself the victorious precursor, he is shewing to these exulting thousands "the *path* of life." He tells them to dread neither for themselves

or others that lonesome tomb. The curse is extracted from it; the envenomed sting is plucked away. In passing through its lonesome chambers they may exult in the thought that a mightier than they has sanctified it by His own presence, and transmuted what was once a gloomy portico into a triumphal arch, bearing the inscription, "O death, I will be thy plagues; O grave, I will be thy destruction!"

IX.

The Mourner's Creed.

How stands our faith?

These mighty thoughts and words of consolation—are they really believed, felt, trusted in, rejoiced over?

Christian, "Believest *thou this?*" * Art thou really looking to this exalted life-giving Saviour? Hast thou in some feeble measure realised this resurrection-life as thine own? Hast thou the joyful consciousness of participating in this vital union with a living Lord? In vain do we listen to these sublime Bethany utterances unless we feel "*Jesus speaks to me,*" and unless we be living from day to day under their invigorating power.

He had unfolded to Martha in a single verse a whole Gospel; He had irradiated by a few words

* John xi. 26.

the darkness of the tomb; and now, turning to the poor dejected weeper at his side, He addresses the all-important question, "Believest thou *this?*"

Her faith had been but a moment before staggering. Some guilty misgivings had been mingling with her anguished tears. She has now an opportunity afforded of rising above her doubts,—the ebbings and flowings of her fitful feelings,—and cleaving fast to the Living Rock.

It elicits an unfaltering response—"Yea, Lord, I believe that thou art the Christ, the Son of God, which should come into the world."*

Remarkable confession! We should not so much have wondered to hear it after the grave, hard by, had been rifled, and the silent lips of Lazarus had been unsealed; or had she stood like the other Mary at her Lord's own sepulchre in the garden, and after a few brief, but momentous days and hours, seen a whole flood of light thrown on the question of His Messiahship.

But as yet there was much to damp such a bold confession, and lead to hesitancy in the avowal of such a creed. The poverty, the humiliations,

* John xi. 27.

the unworldly obscurity of that solitary *One* who claimed no earthly birthright, and owned no earthly dwelling, were not all these, particularly to a Jew, at variance with every idea formed in connexion with the coming Shiloh?

Was Martha's then a blind unmeaning faith? Far from it. It was nurtured, doubtless, in that quiet home of holy love, where, while Lazarus yet lived, this mysterious Being, in an earthly form and in pilgrim garb, came time after time discoursing to them often, as we are warranted to believe, on the dignity of His nature, the glories of His person, the completeness of His work. It was neither the evidence of miracle or prophecy which had revealed to that weeping disciple that Jesus of Nazareth was the Son of God. With the exception of Micah's statement regarding Bethlehem-Ephratah as His birthplace, we question if any other remarkable prediction concerning Him had yet been fulfilled; and so far as miracles were concerned, though she may and must have doubtless known of them by hearsay, we have no evidence that she had as yet so much as witnessed *one*. We never read till this time of their quiet village

being the scene of any manifestations of His power. These had generally taken place either in Jerusalem or in the cities and coasts of Galilee. The probability, therefore, is that Martha had never yet seen that arm of Omnipotence bared, or witnessed those prodigies with which elsewhere He authenticated His claims to Divinity.

Whence then her creed? May we not believe she had made her noble avowal mainly from the study of that beauteous, spotless character—from those looks, and words, and deeds—from that lofty teaching—so unlike every human system—so wondrously adapted to the wants and woes, the sins, the sorrows, and aching necessities of the human heart. All this had left on her own spirit, and on that of Lazarus and Mary, the irresistible impression and evidence that he was indeed the Lord of Glory—"the Hope of Israel, and the Saviour thereof."

And is it not the same evidence we exult in still? Is this not the *reason* of many a humble believer's creed and faith—who may be all unlettered and unlearned in the evidences of the schools —the external and internal bulwarks of our im-

pregnable Christianity? Ask them why they believe? why their faith is so firm — their love so strong?

They will tell you that that Saviour, in all the glories of His person, in all the completeness of His work, in all the beauties of His character, is the very Saviour they need!—that His Gospel is the very errand of mercy suited to their souls' necessities;—that His words of compassion, and tenderness, and hope, are in every way adapted to meet the yearnings of their longing spirits. They need to stand by the grave of no Lazarus to be certified as to His Messiahship. His looks and tones—His character and doctrine, —His cures and remedies for the wants and woes of their ruined natures, point Him out as the true Heavenly Physician.

They can tell of the best of all evidences, and the strongest of all — the *experimental* evidence! They are no theorists. Religion is no subject with them of barren speculation; it is a matter of inner and heartfelt experience. They have tried the cure —they have found it answer;—they have fled to the Physician—they have applied His balm—they

have been healed and live! And you might as well try to convince the restored blind that the sunlight which has again burst on them is a wild dream of fancy, or the restored deaf that the world's joyous melodies which have again awoke on them are the mockeries of their own brain, as convince the spiritually enlightened and awakened that He who has proved to them light and life, and joy and peace—their comfort in prosperity—their refuge in adversity—is other than the *Son of God and Saviour of the world!*

Reader, is this your experience? Have you tasted and seen that the Lord is gracious? Have you felt the preciousness of His gospel, the adaptation of His work to the necessities of your ruined condition?—the power of His grace, the prevalence of His intercession, the fulness and glory and truthfulness of His promises? Are you exulting in Him as the Resurrection and Life, who has raised you from the death of sin, and will at last raise you from the power of death, and invest you with that eternal life which His love has purchased?

Precious as is this hope and confidence at all times, specially so is it, mourners in Zion! in your

seasons of sorrow. When human refuges fail, and human friendships wither, and human props give way, how sustaining to have this "anchor of the soul sure and steadfast"—union with a living Lord on earth, and the joyful hope of endless and uninterrupted union and communion with Him in glory! Are you even now enjoying, through your tears, this blessed persuasion, and exulting in this blessed creed? Do you know the secret of that twofold solace, "the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His sufferings?"—the "fellowship of His sufferings" telling of His sympathy with your sorrows below;—the "power of His resurrection" assuring you of the glorious gift of everlasting life in a world where sorrow dare not enter. Rest not satisfied with a mere outward creed and confession that "Jesus is the Saviour." Let yours be the nobler *formula* of an appropriating faith—"He is *my* Saviour; He loved ME, and gave Himself for ME." Let it not be with you a salvation *possible*, but a salvation *found;* so that, with a tried apostle, you can rise above the surges of deepening tribulation as you glory in the conviction, "I *know* in whom I

have believed, and am persuaded that He is able to keep that which I have committed unto Him."

Sad, indeed, for those who, when "deep calleth unto deep," have no such "strong consolation" to enable them to ride out the storm; who, when sorrow and bereavement overtake them—the lowering shadows of the dark and cloudy day—have still to grope after an *unknown Christ;* and, amid the hollowness of earthly and counterfeit comforts, have to seek, for the first time, the *only* true One.

Oh! if our hour of trial has not yet come, let us be prepared for it—for come it will. Let us seek to have our vessels moored *now* to the Rock of Ages, that when the tempest arises — when the floods beat, and the winds blow, and the wrecks of earthly joy are seen strewing the waters—we may triumphantly utter the challenge, "Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?"

"Say, ye who tempt
The sea of life, by summer gales impell'd,
Have ye this anchor? Sure a time will come
For storms to try you, and strong blasts to rend
Your painted sails, and shred your gold like chaff
O'er the wild wave. And what a wreck is man,
If sorrow find him unsustain'd by God!"

X.

The Master.

MARTHA can withhold no longer from her sister the joyful tidings which she has been the first to hear. With fleet foot she hastens back to the house with the announcement, "The Master is come, and calleth for thee." Mary hears, but makes no comment. Wrapt in the silence of her own meditative grief, "when she heard that, she arose quickly and came unto Him."

> "To her all earth could render nothing back
> Like that pale changeless brow. Calmly she stood
> As marble statue.
> In that maiden's breast
> Sorrow and loneliness sank darkly down,
> Though the blanch'd lips breathed out no boisterous plaint
> Of common grief."

The formal sympathisers who gathered around her had observed her departure. They are led to form their conjectures as to the cause of this sud-

den break in her trance of anguish. She had up till that moment, with the instinctive aversion which mourners only know, and which we have formerly alluded to in the case of Martha, been shrinking from facing the gladsome light of heaven, caring not to look abroad on the blight of an altered world. But the few words her sister uttered, and which the other auditors manifestly had not comprehended, all at once rouse her from her seat of pensive sadness, and her shadow is seen hurrying by the darkened lattice. They can form but one surmise: that, in accordance with wont, she has betaken herself to the burial-ground to feed her morbid grief. "She goeth unto the grave to weep there." Ah! little did they know how much nobler was her motive—how truer and grander the solace she sought and found.

There is little that is really profitable or hallowed in visiting the grave of loved ones. Though fond affection will, from some false feeling of the tribute due to the memory of the departed, seek to surmount sadder thoughts, and linger at the spot where treasured ashes repose, yet — think and act as we may—there is nothing cheering, nothing

elevating *there*. The associations of the burial-place are all with the humiliating triumphs of the King of Terrors. It is a view of death taken from the *earthly* entrance of the valley, not the *heavenly* view of it as that valley opens on the bright plains of immortality. The gay flowers and emerald sod which carpet the grave are poor mockeries to the bereft spirit, shrouding, as they do, nobler withered blossoms which the foot of the destroyer has trampled into dust, and which no earthly beauty can again clothe, or earthly spring reanimate. They are to be pitied who have no higher solace, no better remedy for their grief, than thus to water with unavailing tears the trophies of death; or to read the harrowing record which love has traced on its slab of cold marble, telling of the vanity of human hopes.

Such, however, was not Mary's errand in leaving the chamber of bereavement. That drooping flower was not opening her leaves, only to be crushed afresh with new tear-floods of sorrow. She sought *One* who would disengage her soiled and shattered tendrils from the chill comforts of earth, and bathe them in the genial influences of Heaven. The

music of her Master's name alone could put gladness into her heart—tempt her to muffle other conflicting feelings and hasten to His feet. "*The Master is come!*" Nothing could have roused her from her profound grief but this. While her poor earthly comforters are imagining her prostrate at the sepulchre's mouth, giving vent to the wild delirium of her young grief, she is away, not to the victim of death, but to the Lord of Life, either to tell to Him the tale of her woe, or else to listen from His lips to words of comfort no other comforter had given. Is there not the same music in that name—the same solace and joy in that presence still? Earthly sympathy is not to be despised; nay, when death has entered a household, taken the dearest and the best and laid them in the tomb, nothing is more soothing to the wounded, crushed, and broken one, than to experience the genial sympathy of true Christian friendship. Those, it may be, little known before (comparative strangers), touched with the story of a neighbour's sorrow, come to offer their tribute of condolence, and to "weep with those that weep." Never is *true* friendship so tested as then. Hollow

attachments, which have nothing but the world or a time of prosperity to bind them, discover their worthlessness. "Summer friends" stand aloof—they have little patience for the sadness of sorrow's countenance and the funereal trappings of the death-chamber; while sympathy, based on lofty Christian principle, loves to minister as a subordinate healer of the broken-hearted, and to indulge in a hundred nameless ingenious offices of kindness and love.

But "thus far shalt thou go, and no farther." The purest and noblest and most disinterested of earthly friends can only go a certain way. Their minds and sympathies are limited. They cannot enter into the deep recesses of the smitten heart—the yawning crevices that bereavement has laid bare. *But* JESUS *can!* Ah! there are capacities and sensibilities in that Mighty Heart that can probe the deepest wound and gauge the profoundest sorrow. While from the *best* of earthly comforters the mind turns away unsatisfied; while the burial-ground and the grave only recall the deep humiliations of the body's wreck and ruin—with what fond emotion does the spirit, like Mary,

turn to Him who possesses the majesty of Deity with all the tenderness of humanity. The Mighty Lord, and yet the Elder Brother!

The sympathy of man is often selfish, formal, constrained, commonplace, coming more from the surface than from the depths of the heart. It is the finite sympathy of a finite creature. The Redeemer's sympathy is that of the perfect Man and the infinite God—able to enter into all the peculiarities of the case—all the tender features and shadings of sorrow which are hidden from the keenest and kindliest *human* eye.

Mary's procedure is a true type and picture of what the broken heart of the Christian feels. Not undervaluing human sympathy, yet, nevertheless, all the crowd of sympathising friends—Jewish citizens, Bethany villagers—are nothing to her when she hears *her Lord has come!*

Happy for us if, while the world, like the condoling crowd of Jews, is forming its own cold speculations on the amount of our grief and the bitterness of our loss, we are found hastening to cast our-

selves at our Saviour's feet; if our afflictions prove to us like angel messengers from the inner sanctuary — calling us from friends, home, comforts, blessings, all we most prize on earth—telling us that ONE is nigh who will more than compensate for the loss of all—"*The Master is come, and calleth for thee!*"

It is the very end and design our gracious God has in all His dealings, to lead *us*, as he led Mary, to the feet of Jesus.

Yes! thou poor weeping, disconsolate one, "The Master calleth for *thee.*" *Thee* individually, as if thou stoodest the alone sufferer in a vast world. He wishes to pour His oil and wine into thy wounded heart—to give thee some overwhelming proof and pledge of the love he bears thee in this thy sore trial. He has come to pour drops of comfort in the bitter cup—to ease thee of thy heavy burden, and to point thee to hopes full of immortality. Go and learn what a kind, and gentle, and gracious Master He is! Go forth, Mary, and meet thy Lord. "Weeping may endure for a night, but joy cometh in the morning!"

We may imagine her hastening along the foot-road, with the spirit of the Psalmist's words on her tongue—"As the hart panteth after the water-brooks, so panteth my soul after thee, O God. My soul thirsteth for God—for the living God!"

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XI.

Second Causes.

WITH a bounding heart, Mary was in a moment at her Master's feet. She weeps! and is able only to articulate, in broken accents, "Lord, if thou hadst been here, my brother had not died." It is the repetition of Martha's same expression. Often at a season of sore bereavement some one poignant thought or reflection takes possession of the mind, and, for the time, overmasters every other. This echo of the other mourner's utterance leads us to conclude that it had been a familiar and oft-quoted phrase during these days of protracted agony. This independent quotation, indeed, on the part of each, gives a truthful beauty to the whole inspired narrative.

The twin sisters—musing on the terrible past, gazing through their tears on the vacant seat at

their home-hearth—had been every now and then breaking the gloomy silence of the deserted chamber by exclaiming, "If *He* had been here, this never would have happened! This is the bitterest drop in our cup, that all might have been different! These hot tears might never have dimmed our eyes; our loved Lazarus might have been a living and loving brother still! Oh! that the Lord had delayed for a brief week that untoward journey, or anticipated by four days his longed-for return; or would that we had despatched our messenger earlier for Him. It is now too late. Though He *has* at last come, His advent can be of little avail. The fell destroyer has been at our cottage door before Him. He may soothe our grief, but the blow cannot be averted. *His* friend and *our* brother is locked in sleep too deep to be disturbed."

Ah! is it not the same unkind surmise which is still often heard in the hour of bereavement and in the home of death?—a guilty, unholy brooding over *second causes*. "If such and such had been done, my child had still lived. If that mean, or that remedy, or that judicious caution had been

employed, this terrible overthrow of my earthly hopes would never have occurred; that loved one would have been still walking at my side; that chaplet of sorrows would not now have been girding my brows; the Bethany sepulchre would have been unopened — 'This my brother had not died!'"

Hush! hush! these guilty insinuations—that dethroning of God from the Providential Sovereignty of His own world—that hasty and inconsiderate verdict on His divine procedure.

"If *Thou* hadst been here!" Can we, *dare* we doubt it? Is the departure of the immortal soul to the spirit-world so trivial a matter that the life-giving God takes no cognisance of it? No! Mourning one, in the deep night of thy sorrow, thou must rise above "untoward coincidences" —thou must cancel the words "accident" and "fate" from thy vocabulary of trial. God, *thy* God, was *there!* If there *be* perplexing accompaniments, be assured they were of *His* permitting; all was planned—wisely, kindly planned. Question not the unerring rectitude of His dealings. Though *apparently* absent, He was *really*

present. The apparent veiling of His countenance is only what Cowper calls "the severer aspect of His love." Kiss the rod that smites—adore the hand that lays low. Pillow thy head on that simple, yet grandest source of composure—"*The Lord reigneth!*" It is not for us to venture to dictate what the procedure of infinite love and wisdom should be. To our dim and distorted views of things, it might have been more for the glory of God and the Church's good, if the "beautiful bird of light" had still "sat with its folded wings" ere it sped to nestle in the eaves of Heaven. But if its earthly song has been early hushed; if those full of promise have been allowed rather to fall asleep in Jesus, "Even so, Father; for it seems good in Thy sight!" It was from no want of power or ability on God's part that they were not recalled from the gates of death. "We will be dumb—we will open not our mouths, because *Thou* didst it."

Afflicted one! if the brother or friend whom you now mourn be a brother in glory—if he be now among the white-robed multitude—his last tear wept—for ever beyond reach of a sinning and sorrowing world—can you upbraid your God for

his early departure? Would you weep him back if you could from his early crown?

Fond nature, as it stands in trembling agony watching the ebbing pulses of life, would willingly arrest the pale messenger—stay the chariot—and have the wilderness relighted with his smile.

But when all is over, and you are able to contemplate, with calm emotion, the untold bliss into which the unfettered spirit has entered, do you not feel as if it were cruel selfishness alone that would denude that sainted pilgrim of his glory, and bring him once more back to earth's cares and tribulations?

"We sadly watch'd the close of all,
Life balanced in a breath;
We saw upon his features fall
The awful shade of death.
All dark and desolate we were;
And murmuring nature cried—
'Oh! surely, Lord! hadst *Thou* been here,
Our brother had not died!'

"But when its glance the memory cast
On all that grace had done;
And thought of life's long warfare pass'd,
And endless victory won.
Then faith prevailing, wiped the tear,
And looking upward, cried—
'O Lord! Thou surely *hast* been here,
Our brother has *not* died!'"

We have already had occasion to note the impressive and significant silence of the Saviour to Mary. We may just again revert to it in a sentence here. Martha had, a few moments before, given vent to the same impassioned utterance respecting her departed brother. Jesus had replied to her; questioned her as to her faith; and opened up to her sublime sources of solace and consolation. With Mary it is different. He responds to her also—but it is only in silence and in tears!

Why this distinction? Does it not unfold to us a lovely feature in the dealings of Jesus—how He adapts Himself to the peculiarities of individual character. With those of a bolder temperament He can argue and remonstrate—with those of a meek, sensitive, contemplative spirit, He can be silent and weep!

The stout but manly heart of Peter needed at times a bold and cutting rebuke; a similar reproof would have crushed to the dust the tender soul of John. The character of the one is painted in his walking on the stormy water to meet his Lord; of the other, in his reclining on the bosom of the

same Divine Master, drinking sacred draughts at the Fountain-head of love!

So it was with Martha and Mary, "the Peter and John of Bethany;" and so it is with His people still.

How beautifully and considerately Jesus *studies* their case—adapting His dealings to what He sees and knows they can bear—fitting the yoke to the neck, and the neck to the yoke. To some He is "the Lion of the tribe of Judah, uttering His thunders"—pleading with Martha-spirits "by terrible things in righteousness;"—to others (the shrinking, sensitive Marys) whispering only accents of gentleness—giving expression to no needless word that would aggravate or embitter their sorrows.

Ah, believer! how tenderly considerate is your dear Lord! Well may you make it your prayer, "Let me fall into the hands of God, for great are His mercies!" He may at times, like Joseph to His brethren, *appear* to "speak roughly," but it is dissembled *kindness*. When a father inflicts on his wayward child the severest and harshest discipline, none but he can tell the bitter heart-pangs

of yearning love that accompany every stroke of the rod. So it is with your Father in Heaven; with this difference, that the earthly parent *may* act unwisely, arbitrarily, indiscreetly—he may misjudge the necessities of the case—he may do violence and wrong to the natural disposition of his offspring. Not so with an all-wise Heavenly Parent. He will inflict no redundant or unneeded chastisement. Man *may* err, *has* erred, and *is* ever erring—but "as for God, His way is perfect!"

XII.

The Weeping Saviour.

THE silent procession is moving on. We may suppose they have reached the gates of the burial-ground. But a new scene and incident here arrest our thoughts!

It is not the humiliating memorials of mortality that lie scattered around,—the caves and grottoes and grassy heaps sacred to many a Bethany villager. It is not even the newly sealed stone which marks the spot where Lazarus "sleeps." Let us turn aside for a little, and see this great sight. It is the Creator of all worlds in tears!—the God-man Mediator dissolved in tenderest grief! Of all the memories of Bethany, this surely is the *most* hallowed and the most wondrous. These tears form the most touching episode in sacred story; and if we are in sorrow, it may either dry

our own tears, or give them the warrant to flow when we are told—*Jesus wept!*

Whence those tears? This is what we shall now inquire. There is often a false interpretation put upon this brief and touching verse, as if it denoted the expression of the Saviour's sorrow for the loss of a loved friend. This, it is plain, it could not be. However mingled may have been the hopes and fears of the weeping mourners around him, *He* at least knew that in a few brief moments Lazarus was to be restored. He could not surely weep so bitterly, possessing, as He then did, the confident assurance that death was about to give back its captive, and light up every tear-dimmed eye with an ecstasy of joy. Whence, then, we again ask, this strange and mysterious grief? Come and let us surround the grave of Bethany, and as we behold the chief mourner at that grave, let us inquire why it was that "*Jesus wept!*"

(1.) JESUS WEPT *out of Sympathy for the Bereaved.*

The hearts around Him were breaking with anguish. All unconscious of how soon and how wondrously their sorrow was to be turned into

joy, the appalling thought was alone present to them in all its fearfulness—"Lazarus is dead!" When *He*, the God-man Mediator, with the refined sensibilities of His tender heart, beheld the poignancy of that grief, the pent-up torrent of His own human sympathies could be restrained no longer. His tears flowed too.

But it would be a contracted view of the tears of Jesus to think that two solitary mourners in a Jewish graveyard engrossed and monopolised that sympathy. It had a far wider sweep.

There were hearts, yes—myriads of desolate sufferers in ages then unborn, who He knew would be brought to stand as He was then doing by the grave of loved relatives—mourners who would have no visible comforter or restorer to rush to, as had Martha and Mary, to dry their tears, and give them back their dead; and when He thought of this, "*Jesus wept!*"

What an interest it gives to that scene of weeping, to think that at that eventful moment, the Saviour had before Him the bereaved of *all time*—that His eye was roaming at that moment through deserted chambers, and vacant seats, and opened

graves, down to the end of the world. The aged Jacobs and Rachels weeping for their children—the Ezekiels mourning in the dust and ashes of disconsolate widowhood, "the desire of their eyes taken away by a stroke"—the unsolaced Marys and Marthas brooding over a dark future, with the prop and support of existence swept down, the central sun and light of their being eclipsed in mysterious darkness! Think, (as you are now perusing these pages,) throughout the wide world, how many breaking hearts there are—how loud the wail of suffering humanity, could we but hear it!—those written childless and fatherless, and friendless and homeless!—Bethany-processions pacing with slow and measured step to deposit their earthly all in the cold custody of the tomb! Think of the Marys and Marthas who are now "going to some grave to weep there," perhaps with no Saviour's smile to gladden them—or the desolate chambers that are now resounding to the plaintive dirge, "O Absalom, Absalom, would God I had died for thee; O Absalom, my son! my son!" Think of all these scenes at that moment vividly suggested and pictured to the

Redeemer's eye—the long and loud *miserere*, echoing dismally from the remotest bounds of time, and there "entering into the ear of the God of Sabaoth," and can you wonder that—*Jesus wept!*

Blessed and amazing picture of the Lord of glory! It combines the delineation alike of the tenderness of His humanity, and the majesty of His Godhead. His *Humanity!* It is revealed in those tear drops, falling from a human eye on a human grave. His *Godhead!* It is manifested in His ability to take in with a giant grasp all the prospective sufferings of His suffering people.

Weeping believer! thine anguished heart was included in those Bethany tears! Be assured thy grief was visibly portrayed at that moment to that omniscient Saviour. He had all thy sorrows before Him—thy anxious moments during thy friend's tedious sickness—the trembling suspense —the nights of weary watching—the agonising revelation of "no hope"—the closing scene! Bethany's graveyard became to Him a picture-gallery of the world's aching hearts; and *thine*, yes!

thine was *there!* and as He beheld it, "*Jesus wept!*"

"Jesus wept! These tears are over,
But His heart is still the same;
Kinsman, Friend, and Elder Brother,
Is His everlasting name.

Saviour, who can love like Thee,
Gracious One of Bethany!

"When the pangs of trial seize us,
When the waves of sorrow roll,
I will lay my head on Jesus,
Pillow of the troubled soul.

Surely none can feel like Thee,
Weeping One of Bethany!

"Jesus wept! And still in glory,
He can mark each mourner's tear;
Loving to retrace the story
Of the hearts he solaced here.

Lord! when I am call'd to die,
Let me think of Bethany!

"Jesus wept! That tear of sorrow
Is a legacy of love;
Yesterday, to-day, to-morrow,
He the same doth ever prove.

Thou art all in all to me,
Living One of Bethany!"

(2.) JESUS WEPT *when He thought of the triumphs of Death!*

He was treading a burial ground—mouldering

heaps were around Him—silent sepulchral caves, giving forth no echo of life!

It is a solemn and impressive thing, even for *us*, to tread the graveyard; more especially if there are there nameless treasures of buried affection. The thought that those whose smile gladdened to us every step in the wilderness, who formed our solace in sorrow, and our joy in adversity—whose words, and society, and converse were intertwined with our very being—it is solemn and saddening, as we tread that land of oblivion, to find these words and looks and tears unanswered—a gloomy silence hovering over the spot where the wrecks of worth and loveliness are laid! He would have a bold, a stern heart indeed who could pace unmoved over such hallowed ground, and forbid a tear to flow over the gushing memories of the past!

What, then, must it have been at that moment in Bethany with *Jesus*, when he saw one of those purchased by his own blood (dearest to him) chased by the unsparing destroyer to that gloomy prison-house?

If we have supposed that the tears of Martha

and Mary were suggestive of manifold other broken and sorrowing hearts in other ages, we may well believe that graveyard was suggestive of triumphs still in reserve for the tomb, numberless trophies which in every age were to be reaped in by the King of Terrors until the reaper's arm was paralyzed, and death swallowed up in victory. The few silent sepulchres around must have significantly called to the mind of the Divine spectator how sin had blasted and scathed His noblest workmanship; converting the fairest province of His creation into one vast *Necropolis*,— one dismal "city of the dead!" The body of man, "so fearfully and wonderfully made," and on which he had originally placed His own impress of "very good," *ruined*, and resolved into a mass of humiliating dust! If the Architect mourns over the destruction of some favourite edifice which the storm has swept down, or the fire has wrapt in conflagration and reduced to ashes—if the Sculptor mourns to see his breathing marble with one rude stroke hurled to the ground, and its fragments scattered at his feet—what must have been the sensations of the mighty Architect of the human

frame, at whose completion the morning stars and the sons of God chanted a loud anthem—what must have been His sensations as He thought of them, now a devastated wreck, mouldering in dissolution and decay, the King of Terrors sitting in regal state, holding his high holiday over a vassal world!

In Bethany He beheld only a few of these broken and prostrate columns, but they were powerfully suggestive of millions on millions which were yet in coming ages to undergo the same doom of mortality.

If even our less sensitive hearts may be wrung with emotion at the tidings of some mournful catastrophe that occupies, after all, but some passing hour in the world's history, but which has carried death and lamentation into many households—the sudden pestilence that has swept down its thousands—the gallant vessel that was a moment before spreading proudly its white wings to the gale, the joyous hearts on board dreaming of hearth and home, and the "many ports that would exult in the gleam of her mast"—the next! hurrying down to the depths of an ocean grave,

with no survivor to tell the tale!—or the terrible records of War—the ranks of bold and brave laid low in the carnage of battle—youth and strength and beauty and rank and friendship blent in one red burial!—if these and such like mournful tales of death, and the power of death, affect at the moment even the most callous amongst us, causing the lip to grow pale, and demanding the tribute of more than a tear, oh! what must it have been to the omniscient eye and exquisitely sensitive spirit of Jesus, as, taking in all time at a glance, He beheld the Pale Horse with its ghastly rider trampling under foot the vast human family; converting the globe in which they dwelt into a mournful valley of vision, filled with the wrecks and skeletons of breathing men and animated frames!

The triumphs of death are, in ordinary circumstances, to us scarcely perceptible. He moves with noiseless tread. The footprint is made on the sands of time; but like the tides of the ocean, the world's oblivion-power washes it away. The name of yonder churchyard is "the *land of forgetfulness!*" Not so with the Lord of

Life, the great Antagonist of this usurper! The future, a ghastly future, rose in appalling vividness before Him.—Death (vulture-like) flapping his wings over the multitudes he claimed as his own, —vessels freighted with immortality lying wrecked and stranded on the shores of Time!

Yes! we can only understand the full import of these tears of Jesus, as we imagine to ourselves His Godlike eye penetrating at that moment every churchyard and every grave: the mausoleums of the great—the grassy sods of the poor; the marble cenotaph of the noble and illustrious slumbering under fretted aisle and cathedral canopy—the myriads whose requiem is chanted by the bleak winds of the desert or the chimes of the ocean! The child carried away in the twinkling of an eye—the blossom just opening, and then frost-blighted; the aged sire, cut down like a shock of corn in its season, falling withered and seared like the leaves of autumn; the young exulting in the prime of manhood; the pious and benevolent, the great and good, succumbing indiscriminately to the same inexorable decree; the erring and thoughtless, reckless of all warning, hurried away in the midst

of scorned mercy—Oh! as He beheld this ghastly funeral procession moving before Him, the whole world going to the same long home, and He Himself alone left the survivor, can we wonder that *Jesus wept?*

(3.) Once more, JESUS WEPT *when He thought of the impenitence and obduracy of the human heart.*

This may not be at first sight patent as a cause of the tears of Jesus, but we may well believe it entered largely as an element into this strange flood of sorrow.

He was about to perform a great (His greatest) miracle; but while he knew that, in consequence of this manifestation of His mighty power, many of those who now stood around Lazarus' tomb would *believe*, he knew also that others would only "despise, and wonder, and perish;" that while some, as we shall afterwards find, acknowledged Him as the Messiah, others went straightway into Jerusalem to concert with the Pharisees in plotting His murder. When He observed the impenitence of these obdurate hearts at His side, He could not subdue His tenderest emotion. We

read that, when He saw the sisters weeping, *and the Jews that were with them weeping*, Jesus wept. These Jews could weep for a fellow-mortal, but they could not weep for *themselves*, and therefore *for them, Jesus wept!*

One soul was precious to Him. He who alone can estimate alike the worth and the loss of the soul, might have wept, even had there been but one then present found to resist His claims and forfeit His salvation. But these tears extended far beyond that lonely spot in a Jewish village, and the few impenitent hearts that were then flocking around. These obdurate Jews were types of the world's impenitency. There was at that moment summoned before Him a mournful picture of the hardened hearts in every age—those who would read His gospel, and hear of His miracles, and listen to the story of His love all unmoved—who would die as they had lived, uncheered by His grace and unmeet for His presence.

Ah! surely no cause could more tenderly elicit a Redeemer's tears than *this*—the thought of His Redemption scorned, His blood trampled on, His work set at nought.

If we have thought of Him shedding tears over the ruin of the *body*, what must have been the depth and intensity of those tears over the sadder, more fearful ruin of the soul? Immortal powers, that ought to have been ennobled and consecrated to His service, alienated, degraded, destroyed!—immortal beings spurning from them the day of grace and the hopes of heaven! Bitter as may have been the wail of mourning and sorrowing hearts that may then have reached His ear from future ages, more agonising and dismal far must have been the wailing cry which, beyond the limits of time, came floating up from a dark and dreary eternity; those who might have believed and lived, but who blasphemed or trifled, neglected and procrastinated, and finally perished!

If we think of it, it is not the loss of health, or the loss of wealth, or the loss of friends, which forms the heaviest of trials, the deepest ground of soul sadness. *We* put on the sable attire as emblems of mourning; but if we saw it as a weeping Jesus sees it, there is more real cause for sackcloth and ashes in the heart at enmity with God, and despising His salvation, trampling under foot His

Son, and enacting over again the sad tragedy of Calvary.

Reader! are you at this moment guilty of living on in a state of presumptuous impenitence—salvation unsought—Jesus a stranger—His name unhonoured—His Bible unread—His promises unappropriated—His wrath undreaded—defeating all His marvellous appliances of love, and remonstrance, and forbearance—meeting a prodigal expenditure of patience and long-suffering with cold and chilling indifference and neglect—casting away from you the hoarded riches of eternity which He has been holding out for your acceptance? In that sacred Bethany ground, as ye mark these falling tear-drops which dim His eye, there may have been a tear for *you!* Eighteen hundred years have since elapsed, but He to whom "a thousand years are as one day," marked even *then* your present ungrateful apostacy or guilty alienation—there was a tear then which stole down that cheek on account of unrequited love?

Is that tear to flow in vain? Are you to mock His tender sympathy still with cold formalism, or persisted-in impenitency? Are you to think

of Bethany and its tear-drops and still go on in sin?

Ah, never was sermon preached to an erring or impenitent sinner half so eloquent as *this*. Paul was not given to weeping, and it makes his fervid love of souls all the more striking when we find him confessing that he had wept like a child over those who were "enemies to the cross of Christ." We have often felt Paul's burning tears over hardened sinners to be touching and impressive. But what are they, after all, in comparison with those of Paul's Lord?

He, the Great Sun of the World—the Sun of Righteousness, was to set in a few brief days behind the walls of ungrateful Jerusalem in darkness and blood—His last rays seem now lingering over the crest of Olivet—His tears seem to tell that He has clung till He can cling no more to the fond hope that an impenitent nation and guilty city will yet turn at His reproof, believe and live.

And still does He linger among *us*. Though the night cometh, the beams of mercy are still tardily lingering, as if loth to leave the backsliding

to their wanderings, or the impenitent to their own midnight of despair.

O Reader! leave not *this* subject—leave not the graveyard of Bethany till you think of Jesus as then weeping for *thee*. Yes! for *thee*—thy pitiable condition—thy perverse ingratitude—thy slighting of His warnings—thy grieving of His spirit—thy unkindness to *Him*—thine obstinate disregard of thine own everlasting interests. Let it be the most wondrous and heart-searching of all the memories of Bethany, that for thy soul—that traitor, truant, worthless soul—which like a stray planet He might have suffered to drift away from Himself into the blackness of eternal darkness—helpless, hopeless, ruined, lost!—Yes! that for *thee*, JESUS WEPT!

"And doth the Saviour weep
Over His people's sin,
Because we will not let Him keep
The souls He died to win?
Ye hearts that love the Lord,
If at this sight ye burn,
See that in thought, in deed, in word,
Ye hate what made Him mourn."

XIII.

The Grave Stone.

THEY have now reached the grave. It was a rocky sepulchre. A flat stone (possibly with some Hebrew inscription) lay upon the mouth of it.

In wondering amazement the sorrowing group follow the footsteps of the Saviour. "Behold how He loved him," whisper the Jews to one another as they witness His fast falling tears. Can His repairing thus to the tomb be anything more than to pay a mournful tribute to an honoured friendship, and behold the silent home of the loved dead? Nay; He is about, as the Lord of Life, to wrench away the swaddling-bands of corruption, to vindicate His name and prerogative as the "Abolisher of death"—to have the first-fruits of that vast triumph which, ages before the birth of time, He had anticipated with longing earnestness—"I will ran-

som them from the power of the grave, I will redeem them from death. O death, I will be thy plagues; O grave, I will be thy destruction."

Does He proceed forthwith to speak the word, and to accomplish the giant deed? He breaks silence. But we listen, in the first instance, not to the omnipotent summons, but to an address to the bystanders—"*Jesus said, Take ye away the stone!*" *

What need of this parenthesis in His mighty work? Why this summoning in any feeble human agency when His own independent fiat could have effected the whole? Would it not have been a more startling manifestation of Omnipotence, by a mandate similar to that which chained the tempests of Tiberias, or the demoniac of Gadara, to have hurled the incumbent stone into fragments? Might not He who has "the keys of the grave and of death" have Himself unlocked the portals preparatory to the vaster prodigy that was to follow?

Nay, there was a mighty lesson to be read in thus delegating human hands to remove the in-

* John xi. 39.

tervening barrier. The Church of the living God may, in every age, gather from it instruction!

What, then, does the Saviour here figuratively, but significantly, teach His people? Is it not the important truth that, though dependent on Him for all they are, and all they have, they are not thereby released and exempted from the use of *means?* He alone can bring back Lazarus from his death-sleep. Martha and Mary may weep an ocean of tears, but they cannot weep him back. They may linger for days and nights in that lonely graveyard, making it resound with their bitter dirges, but their impassioned entreaties will be mocked with impressive silence. Too well do they know *that* spirit is fled beyond their recall—the spark of life extinguished beyond any earthly rekindling!

But though the word of Omnipotence can alone bring back the dead, human hands and human efforts can roll away the interjacent stone, and prepare for the performance of the miracle; and after the miracle *is* performed, human hands may again be called in to tear off the cerements of the tomb,

to ungird the bandages from the restored captive, to "loose him and let him go!"

This simple incident in the Bethany narrative admits of manifold practical applications. Let us look to it with reference to the mightier moral miracle of the Resurrection of the soul "dead in trespasses and sins." Jesus, and Jesus alone, can awake that soul from the deep slumber of its spiritual death, and invest it with the glories of a new resurrection-life. In vain can it awake of itself; no human skill can put animation into the moral skeleton. No power of human eloquence, no "excellency of man's wisdom," can open these rayless eyes, and pour life, and light, and hope into the dull caverns of the spiritual sepulchre. "Prophesy to the dry bones!"—We may prophesy for ever—we may wake the valley of vision by ceaseless invocations, but the dead will hear not. No bone of the spiritual skeleton will stir, for it is "not by might, nor by power, but by My Spirit, saith the Lord of Hosts."

But though it be a Divine work from first to last which effects the spiritual regeneration of man, are we from this presumptuously to disregard the use

of means? Are prayer, and preaching, and human effort, and strenuous earnestness in the work of our high calling, are these all to be superseded, and pronounced unavailing and unnecessary?

Nay, though man cannot wake to life his dormant spiritual energies—though these lie slumbering in the deep sleep of the sheeted dead, and nothing but Lazarus' Lord can break the moral trance—yet *he can use the appointed means.* He dare not be guilty of the monstrous inconsistency and crime of willingly allowing impediments to stand in the way of his spiritual revival which his own efforts may remove! He cannot expect his Lord to sound over his soul the gladdening accents of peace, and reconciliation, and joy, if some known sin be still lying, like the superincumbent grave-stone, which it is in his power to roll away, and at his peril if he suffer to remain!

Christ is alone the "abolisher of death," and the "giver of life;" but notwithstanding this, "Roll ye away the stone!"—neglect not the means He has appointed and prescribed. If ye neglect prayer, and despise ordinances, and trifle with temptation, or venture on forbidden ground, ye are

only making the intervening obstacle firmer and faster, and wilfully denuding yourselves of the gift of life. Naaman must plunge seven times in Jordan, else he cannot be made clean. To cleanse *himself* of his leprosy he cannot, but to wash in Jordan *he can*. The Israelite must gaze on the brazen serpent; he cannot of himself heal one fevered wound, but to gaze on the appointed symbol of cure he can. In vain can the engines of war effect a breach on the walls of Jericho; but the hosts of Joshua can sound the appointed trumpet, and raise the prescribed shout, and the battlements in a moment are in the dust. Martha and Mary in vain can make their voices be heard in the "dull, cold ear of death," but at their Lord's bidding they can hurl back the outer portals where their dead is laid. They cannot unbind one fetter, but they can open with human hand the prison-door to admit the Divine Liberator.

Let it not be supposed that in this we detract in any wise from the omnipotence of the Saviour's grace. God forbid! All is of grace, from first to last—free, sovereign grace. Man has no more merit in salvation than the beggar has merit in reaching

forth his hand for alms, or in stooping down to drink of the wayside fountain. But neither must we ignore the great truth which God strives throughout His Word to impress upon us, that He works by *means*, and that for the neglect of these means we are ourselves responsible. Paul had the assurance given him by an angel from heaven, when tossed in the storm in Adria, that not one life in his vessel was to be lost; that though the ship was to be wrecked, all her crew were to come safe to land. But was there on this account any effort on his part relaxed to secure their safety? No! he toiled and laboured at the pumps and rigging and anchors as unremittingly as before; and when some of the sailors made the cowardly attempt, by lowering a small boat, to effect their own escape, the voice of the apostle was heard proclaiming, amid the storm, that unless they abode in the ship none could be saved!

The true philosophy of the Gospel system is this, to feel as if much depended on ourselves; but at the same time entertaining the loftier conviction that *all* depends upon God. Jesus, when He invites to the strait gate, does not inculcate remain-

ing outside, in a state of passive and listless inaction, until the portals be seen to move by the Divine hand. His exhortation and command rather is, "Strive"—"knock"—*agonise* to "enter in!" We are not to ascend to heaven, seated, like Elijah, in a chariot of fire, without toil or effort, but rather to "*fight* the good fight of faith." The saying of the great Apostle is a vivid portraiture of what the Christian's feelings ought to be regarding personal holiness—"I laboured, . . . yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me."

As the Lord of Bethany gives the summons, "Roll ye away the stone," His words seem paraphrased in this other Scripture, "Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God that worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure." You may feel assured that He will not impose upon you one needless burden; He will not exact more than He knows your strength will bear; He will ask no Peter to come to Him on the water, unless He impart at the same time strength and support on the unstable wave; He will not demand of you the endurance of providences, and trials, and temptations you are

unable to cope with; He will not ask you to draw water if the well is too deep, or withdraw the stone if too heavy. But neither, at the same time, will He admit as an impossibility that which, as a free and responsible agent, it is in your power to avert. He will not regard as your misfortune what is your crime. "If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear me."

Oh! let life be, more than it ever has been, one constant effort to roll away the stone from the moral sepulchre—carefully to remove every barrier between our souls and Jesus—looking forward to that glorious day when the voice of the Restorer shall be heard uttering the omnipotent "*Come forth!*" and to His angel assessors the mandate shall be given regarding the thronging myriads of risen dead, "*Loose them and let them go!*"

XIV.

Unbelief.

MAN—short-sighted man—often raises impossibilities when God does not. It is hard for rebellious unbelief to lie submissive and still. In moments when the spirit might well be overawed into silence, it gives utterance to its querulous questionings and surmisings rather than remain obedient at the feet of Christ, reposing on the sublime aphorism, "All things are possible to him that believeth." In the mind of Martha, where faith had been so recently triumphant, doubt and unbelief have begun again to insinuate themselves. This "Peter of her sex" had ventured out boldly on the water to meet her Lord. She had owned Him as the giver of life, and triumphed in Him as her Saviour! But now she is beginning to sink. A natural difficulty presents itself to her mind about the removal

of the incumbent grave-stone. She avers how needless its displacement would be, as by this time corruption must have begun its fatal work. Four brief days only had elapsed since the eye of Lazarus had beamed with fraternal affection. Now these lips must be "saying to corruption, Thou art my father; to the worm, Thou art my mother and my sister." Death, she felt, must now be stamping his impressive mockery on that cherished earthly friendship, and, attired in his most terrible insignia, putting the last fatal extinguisher on the g'immerings of her faith and hope. "What need is there, Lord," she seems to say, "for this redundant labour? My brother is far beyond the reach even of a voice like Thine. Why excite vain expectations in my breast which never can be realised? That grave has closed upon him for the 'for ever' of time. Nothing now can revoke the sentence, or reanimate the silent dust, save the trump of God on the final day." *

Thus blindly did Martha reason. She can see no other object her Redeemer can have for the removal of the stone, save to gaze once more on a form and

* John xi. 39.

countenance He loved. Both for His sake, and the strangers assembled, she recoils from the thought of disclosing so humiliating a sight.

Alas! how little are fitful frames and feelings to be trusted. Only a few brief moments before, she had made a noble protestation of her faith in the presence of her Lord. His own majestic utterances had soothed her griefs, dried her tears, and elicited the confession that He was truly the Son of God. But the sight of the tomb and its mournful accompaniments obliterate for a moment the recollection of better thoughts and a nobler avowal. She forgets that "things which are impossible with men are possible with God." She is guilty of "limiting the Holy One of Israel."

How often is it so with us! How easy is it for us, like Martha, to be bold in our creed when there is nothing to cross our wishes, or dim and darken our faith. But when the hour of trial comes, how often does *sense* threaten to displace and supplant the nobler antagonist principle! How often do we lose sight of the Saviour at the very moment when we most need to have Him continually in view! How often are our convic-

tions of the efficacy of prayer most dulled and deadened just when the dark waves are cresting over our heads, and voices of unbelief are uttering the upbraiding in our ears, "Where is now thy God?" But will Jesus leave His people to their own guilty unbelieving doubts? Will Martha, by her unworthy insinuations, put an arrest on her Lord's arm; or will He, in righteous retribution for her faithlessness, leave the stone sealed, and the dead unraised?

Nay! He loves His people too well to let their stupid unbelief and hardness of heart interfere with His own gracious purposes! How tenderly He rebukes the spirit of this doubter. "Why," as if He said, "Why distrust me? Why stultify thyself with these unbelieving surmises. Hast thou already forgotten my own gracious assurances, and thine own unqualified acceptance of them. My hand is never shortened that it cannot save; my ear is never heavy that it cannot hear. I can call the things which are not, and make them as though they were. Said I not unto thee, in that earnest conversation which I had a little ago outside the village, in which Gospel faith was

the great theme, if thou wouldst believe, thou shouldst see the glory of God?"

This Bethany utterance has still a voice,—a voice of rebuke and of comfort in our hours of trial. When, like aged Jacob, we are ready to say, "All these things are against me;" when we are about to lose the footsteps of a God of love, or *have* perhaps lost them, there is a voice ready to hush into silence every unbelieving doubt and surmise. "Although thou sayest thou canst not see Him, yet judgment is before Him, therefore trust thou in Him." God often thus hides Himself from His people in order to try their faith, and elicit their confidence. He puts us in perplexing paths—"allures" and "brings into the wilderness," only, however, that we may see more of Himself, and that He may "speak comfortably unto us." He lets our need attain its extremity, that His intervention may appear the more signal. He suffers apparently even His own promises to fail, that He may test the faith of His waiting people;—tutor them to "hope against hope," and to find, in *unanswered* prayers and baffled expectations, only a fresh reason for clinging to His all-powerful arm, and frequenting His mercy-seat.

He dashes first to the ground our human confidences and refuges, shewing how utterly "vain is the help of man;" so that faith, with her own folded, dove-like wings, may repose in quiet confidence in His faithfulness, saying, "In the Lord put I my trust: why say ye to my soul, Flee as a bird to your mountain?"

Reader! It would be well for you to hear this gentle chiding of Christ, too, in the moment of your *spiritual* depression;—when complaining of your corruptions, the weakness of your graces, your low attainments in holiness, the strength of your temptations, and your inability to resist sin. "*Said I not unto thee,*" interposes this voice of mingled reproof and love, "My grace is sufficient for thee?" "The bruised reed I will not break, the smoking flax I will not quench." "Look unto *Me,* and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth." We are too apt to look to *ourselves,* to turn our contemplation *inwards,* instead of keeping the eye of faith centered undeviatingly on a faithful covenant-keeping God, laying our finger on every promise of His Word, and making the challenge regarding each, "Hath he said, and shall he not do it? or hath he *spoken, and shall* he not bring it to pass?"

Yes; there may be much to try and perplex. Sense and sight may stagger, and stumble, and fall; we may be able to see no break in the clouds; "deep may be calling to deep," and wave responding to wave, "yet the Lord will command his loving-kindness in the daytime, and in the night his song shall be with me." If we only "*believe*" in spite of unbelief; hoping on, and praying on, and trusting on; like the great Father of the faithful, in the midst of adverse providences, "strong in faith, giving glory to God," He will yet cause the day-spring from on high to visit us. Even in *this* world perplexing paths may be made plain, and slippery places smooth, and judgments "bright as the noonday;" but if not *here*, there *is* at least a glorious day of disclosures at hand, when the reign of unbelieving doubt shall terminate for ever, when the archives of a chequered past will be ransacked of their every mystery;—all events mirrored and made plain in the light of eternity; and this saying of the weeping Saviour of Bethany obtain its true and everlasting fulfilment, "SAID I NOT UNTO THEE, IF THOU WOULDST BELIEVE, THOU SHOULDST SEE THE GLORY OF GOD?"

XV.

The Divine Pleader.

THE stone is rolled away, but there is a solemn pause just when the miracle is about to be performed.

Jesus prays! The God-Man Mediator — the Lord of Life—the Abolisher of Death—the Being of all Beings—who had the boundless treasures of eternity in His grasp—pauses by the grave of the dead, and lifts up His eyes to heaven in supplication! How often in the same incidents, during our Lord's incarnation, do we find His manhood and His Godhead standing together in stupendous contrast. At His birth, the mystic star and the lowly manger were together; at His death, the ignominious cross and the eclipsed sun were together. Here He weeps and prays at the very moment when He is baring the arm of Omnipotence. The

"mighty God" appears in conjunction with "the man Christ Jesus." "His name is Immanuel, God with us."

The body of Lazarus was now probably, by the rolling away of the stone, exposed to view. It was a humiliating sight. Earth—the grave—could afford no solace to the spectators. The Redeemer, by a significant act, shews them where alone, at such an hour, comfort can be found. He points the mourning spirit to its only true source of consolation and peace in God Himself, teaching it to rise above the mortal to the immortal—the corruptible to the incorruptible—from earth to heaven.

Ah! there is nothing but humiliation and sadness in every view of the grave and corruption. Why dwell on the shattered casket, and not rather on the jewel which is sparkling brighter than ever in a better world? Why persist in gazing on the trophies of the last enemy, when we can joyfully realise the emancipated soul exulting in the plenitude of purchased bliss? Why fall with broken wing and wailing cry to the dust, when on eagle-pinion we can soar to the celestial gate, and learn

the unkindness of wishing the sainted and crowned one back to the nether valley?

It is *Prayer*, observe, which thus brings the eye and the heart near to heaven. It is *Prayer* which opens the celestial portals, and gives to the soul a sight of the invisible.

Yes; ye who may be now weeping in unavailing sorrow over the departed, remember, in conjunction with the *tears*, the *prayers* of Jesus. Many a desolate mourner derives comfort from the thought—"Jesus wept." Forget not this other simple entry in our touching narrative, telling where the spirit should ever rest amid the shadows of death—"*Jesus lifted up his eyes, and said, Father, I thank Thee that Thou hast heard me. And I knew that Thou hearest me always.*" *

Let us gather for a little around this incident in the story of Bethany. It is one of the many golden sayings of priceless value.

That utterance has at this moment lost none of its preciousness; that voice, silent on earth, is still eloquent in heaven. The Great Intercessor still is there, "walking in the midst of the seven golden

* John xi. 41.

candlesticks;" loving to note all the wants and weaknesses, the necessities and distresses, of every Church, and every member of His Church. What He said of old to Peter, He says to every trembling believer—"I *have* prayed, and *am* praying for *thee*, that thy faith fail not!" "For *thee!*" We must not merge the interest which Jesus has in each separate member of His family, in His intercession for the Church in general. While He lets down His censer, and receives into it, for presentation on the golden altar, the prayers of the vast aggregate; while, as the true High Priest, He enters the holiest of all with the names of His spiritual Israel on His breastplate—carrying the burden of their hourly needs to the foot of the mercy-seat;—yet still, He pleads, as if the case of *each* stood separate and alone! He remembers *thee*, dejected Mourner, as if there were no other heart but thine to be healed, and no other tears but thine to be dried. His own words, speaking of believers, not collectively but individually, are these—"I will confess *his* name before my Father and his angels."* "*Who* touched

* Rev. iii. 5.

me?" was His interrogation once on earth, as His discriminating love was conscious of some special contact amid the press of the multitude,—"*Somebody* hath touched me!" If we can say, in the language of Paul's appropriating faith, "He loved *me*, and gave Himself for *me*," we can add, He pleads for *me*, and bears *me!* He bears this very heart of *mine*, with all its weaknesses, and infirmities, and sins, before His Father's throne. He has engraven each stone of His Zion on the "palms of His hands," and "its walls are continually before Him!"

How untiring, too, in His advocacy! What has the Christian so to complain of, as his own cold, unworthy prayers—mixed so with unbelief—soiled with worldliness—sometimes guiltily omitted or curtailed. Not the fervid ejaculations of those feelingly alive to their spiritual exigencies, but listless, unctionless, the hands hanging down, the knees feeble and trembling!

But notwithstanding all, Jesus *pleads!* Still the Great Intercessor "waits to be gracious." He is at once Moses on the mountain, and Joshua on the battle-plain—fighting *with* us in the one, pray-

ing *for* us in the other. No Aarons or Hurs needed to sustain His sinking strength, for it is His sublime prerogative neither to "faint nor grow weary!" There is no loftier occupation for faith than to speed upwards to the throne and behold that wondrous Pleader, receiving at one moment, and at *every* moment, the countless supplications and prayers which are coming up before Him from every corner of His Church. The Sinner just awoke from his moral slumber, and in the agonies of conviction, exclaiming, "What must I do to be saved?"—The Procrastinator sending up from the brink of despair the cry of importunate agony.—The Backslider wailing forth his bitter lamentation over guilty departures, and foul ingratitude, and injured love.—The Sick man feebly groaning forth, in undertones of suffering, his petition for succour.—The Dying, on the brink of eternity, invoking the presence and support of the alone arm which can be of any avail to them. —The Bereaved, in the fresh gush of their sorrow, calling upon Him who is the healer of the broken-hearted. But *all heard!* Every tear marked—every sigh registered—every suppliant succoured.

Amalek may come threatening nothing but discomfiture; but that pleading Voice on the heavenly Hill is "greater far than all that can be against us!" He pleads for His elect in every phase of their spiritual history—He pleads for their inbringing into His fold—He pleads for their perseverance in grace—He pleads for their deliverance at once from the accusations and the power of Satan—He pleads for their growing sanctification;—and when the battle of life is over, He uplifts His last pleading voice for their complete glorification. The intercession of Jesus is the golden key which unlocks the gates of Paradise to the departing soul. At a saint's dying moments we are too often occupied with the lower *earthly* scene to think of the *heavenly*. The tears of surrounding relatives cloud too often the more glorious revelations which faith discloses. But in the muffled stillness of that death-chamber, when each is holding his breath as the King of Terrors passes by—if we could listen to it, we should hear the "Prince who has power with God" thus uttering His final prayer, and on the rushing wings of ministering angels receiving an answer while He

is yet speaking—"Father, I will that they also, whom thou hast given me, be with me where I am, that they may behold my glory!"

Reader! exult more and more in this all-prevailing Advocate. See that ye approach the mercy-seat with no other trust but in His atoning work and meritorious righteousness. There was but *One* solitary man of the whole human race who, of old, in the Jewish temple, was permitted to speak face to face with Jehovah. There is but ONE solitary Being in the vast universe of God who, in the heavenly sanctuary, can effectually plead in behalf of His Spiritual Israel. "Seeing, then, that we have a Great High Priest passed into the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, . . . let us come boldly to the throne of grace." If Jesus delights in asking, God delights in bestowing. Let us put our every want, and difficulty, and perplexity, in His hand, feeling the precious assurance, that all which is really good for us will be given, and all that is adverse will, in equal mercy, be withheld. There is no limitation set to our requests. The treasury of grace is flung wide open for every suppliant. "Verily, verily, I say unto

you, whatsoever ye shall ask the Father *in my name* He will give it you." Surely we may cease to wonder that the Great Apostle should have clung with such intense interest to this elevating theme—the Saviour's *intercession*;—that in his brief, but most comprehensive and beautiful creed,* he should have so exalted, as he does, its relative importance, compared with other cognate truths. "It is Christ that died, *yea rather*, that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, *who also maketh intercession for us.*" Climbing, step by step, in the upward ascent of Christian faith and hope, he seems only to "reach the height of his great argument" when he stands on "*the mountain of myrrh and the hill of frankincense.*" *There*, gazing on the face of the great officiating Priest who fills all heaven with His fragrance, and feeling that against *that* intercession the gates of hell can never prevail, he can utter the challenge to devils, and angels, and men, "Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?"

* Rom. viii. 34.

XVI.

The Omnipotent Summons.

THE moment has now come for the voice of Omnipotence to give the mandate. The group have gathered around the sepulchral grotto—the Redeemer stands in meek majesty in front—the teardrop still glistening in His eye, and that eye directed heavenward! Martha and Mary are gazing on His countenance in dumb emotion, while the eager bystanders bend over the removed stone to see if the dead be still there. Yes! *there* the captive lies—in uninvaded silence—attired still in the same solemn drapery. The Lord gives the word. "*Lazarus come forth!*" peals through the silent vault. The dull, cold ear seems to listen. The pulseless heart begins to beat — the rigid limbs to move—*Lazarus lives!* He rises girt in

the swaddling-bands of the tomb, once more to walk in the light of the living.

Where Scripture is silent, it is vain for us to picture the emotions of that moment, when the weeping sisters found the gloomy hours of disconsolate sorrow all at once rolled away. The cry of mingled wonder and gratitude rings through that lonely graveyard,—"This our brother was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found!"

O most wondrous power—Death vanquished in his own territory! The sleeper has awoke a moral Samson, snapping the withs with which the King of Terrors had bound him. The star of Bethlehem shines, and the Valley of Achor becomes a door of hope. The all-devouring destroyer has to relinquish his prey.

Was the joy of that moment confined to these two bosoms? Nay! The Church of Christ in every age may well love to linger around the grave of Lazarus. In *his* resurrection there is to His true people a sure pledge and earnest of their own. It was the first sheaf reaped by the mower's sickle anticipatory of the great Harvest-home of the Final day "when all that are in their

graves" shall hear the same voice and shall "come forth." *

Solemn, surely, is the thought that that same portentous miracle performed on Lazarus is one day to be performed on *ourselves*. Wherever we repose —whether, as *he* did, in the quiet churchyard of our native village, or in the midst of the city's crowded cemetery, or far away amid the alien and stranger in some foreign shore, our dust shall be startled by that omnipotent summons. How shall we hear it? Would it sound in our ears like the sweet tones of the silver trumpet of Jubilee? Would it be to gaze like Lazarus on the face of our best friend—to see *Jesus* bending over us in looks of tenderness—to hear the living tones of that same voice, whose accents were last heard in the dark valley, whispering hopes full of immortality? True, we have not to wait for a Saviour's love and presence till then. The hour of *death* is to the Christian the birthday of endless life. Guardian angels are hovering around his dying pillow ready to waft his spirit into Abraham's bosom. "The souls of believers do *immediately* pass into glory."

* John v. 29.

But the full plenitude of their joy and bliss is reserved for the time when the precious but redeemed dust, which for a season is left to moulder in the tomb, shall become instinct with life—"the corruptible put on incorruption, and the mortal immortality." The spirits of the just enter at *death* on "the inheritance of the saints in light;" but at the *Resurrection* they shall rise as separate orbs from the darkness and night of the grave, each to "shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father." However glorious the emancipation of the soul in the moment of dissolution, it is not until the plains and valleys of our globe shall stand thick with the living of buried generations—each glorified body the image of its Lord's—that the predicted anthem will be heard waking the echoes of the universe—"O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory?" Then, with the organs of their resurrection-bodies ennobled, etherealised, purified from all the grossness of earth, they shall "behold the King in his beauty." "The King's daughter," all glorious without, "all glorious within"—"her clothing of wrought gold"—resplendent *without* with the robes of righteous-

ness—radiant *within* with the beauties of holiness—shall be brought "with gladness and rejoicing," and "enter into the King's palace." This will form the full meridian of the saints' glory—the essence and climax of their new-born bliss—the full vision and fruition of a Saviour-God. "When He shall appear, . . . we shall see Him as He is!" The first sight which will burst on the view of the Risen ones will be *Jesus! His* hands will wreath the glorified brows, in presence of an assembled world, with the crown of life. From *His* lips will proceed the gladdening welcome—"Enter thou into the joy of thy Lord!"

But this will not exhaust the elements of bliss in the case of the "perfected just" on the day of their final triumph. Though the presence of their adorable Redeemer would be enough, and more than enough, to fill their cup with happiness, there will be others also to welcome them, and to augment their joy. Lazarus' Lord was not *alone* at the sepulchre's brink, at Bethany, ready to greet him back. Two loved sisters shared the joy of that gladsome hour. We are left to picture for ourselves the reunion, when, with hand linked in hand, they retraversed

the road which had so recently echoed to the voice of mourning, and entered once more their home, radiant with a sunshine they had imagined to have passed away from it for ever!

So will it be with the believer on the morning of the Resurrection. While his Lord will be *there*, waiting to welcome him, there will be others ready with their presence to enhance the bliss of that gladdening restoration. Those whose smiles were last seen in the death-chamber of earth, now standing—not as Martha and Mary, with the tear on their cheek and the furrow of deep sorrow on their brow, but robed and radiant in resurrection attire, glowing with the anticipations of an everlasting and indissoluble reunion!

Can we anticipate, in the resurrection of Lazarus, our own happy history? Yes! *happier* history, for it will not *then* be to come forth once more, like *him*, into a weeping world, to renew our work and warfare, feeling that restoration to life is only but a brief reprieve, and that soon again the irrevocable sentence will and must overtake us! Not like *him*, going to a home still covered with the drapery of sorrow,—a few transient years and the

mournful funeral tragedy to be repeated,—but to enter into the region of endless life—to pass from the dark chambers of corruption into the peace and glories of our Heavenly Father's joyous *Home*, and "so to be for ever with the Lord!"

Sometimes it is with dying believers as with Lazarus. Their Lord, at the approach of death, *seems* to be absent. He who gladdened their homes and their hearts in life, is, for some mysterious reason, away in the hour of dissolution; their spirits are depressed; their faith languishes; they are ready to say, "Where is now my God?" But as He returned to Bethany to awake His sleeping friend, so will it be with all his true people, on that great day when the arm of death shall be for ever broken. If *now* united to Him by a living faith,—loved by Him as Lazarus was, and conscious, however imperfectly, of loving Him back in return,—we may go down to our graves, making Job's lofty creed and exclamation our own, "I know that my Redeemer liveth, and that he shall stand at the latter day upon the earth; and though after my skin worms destroy this body, yet in my flesh shall I see God."

One remark more. We have listened to the Omnipotent fiat,—"Lazarus, come forth!" We have seen the ear of death starting at the summons, and the buried captive goes free! Shall we follow the family group within the hallowed precincts of the Bethany dwelling? Shall fancy pour her strange and mysterious queries into the ear of him who has just come back from that land "from whose bourne no traveller returns?" He had been, in a far truer sense than Paul in an after year, in "*Paradise.*" He must have heard unspeakable and unutterable words, "which it is not possible for a man to utter." He had looked upon the Sapphire Throne. He had ranged himself with the adoring ranks. He had strung his harp to the Eternal Anthem. When, lo! an angel—a "ministering one"—whispers in his ear to hush his song, and speed him back again for a little season to the valley below.

Startling mandate! Can we suppose a remonstrance to so strange a summons? What! to be uncrowned and unglorified!—Just after a few sips of the heavenly fountain, to be hurried away back again to the Valley of Baca!—to gather up once

more the soiled earthly garments and the pilgrim staff, and from the pilgrim rest and the victor's palm to encounter the din and dust and scars of battle! What!—just after having wept his final tear, and fought the last and the most terrible foe, to have his eye again dimmed with sorrow, and to have the thought before him of breasting a second time the swellings of Jordan!

"The Lord hath need of thee," is all the reply. It is enough! He asks no more! That glorious Redeemer had left a far brighter throne and heritage for *him*. Lazarus, come forth! sounds in his old world-home, whence his spirit had soared, and in his beloved Master's words, on a mightier embassy, he can say,—"Lo, I come! I delight to do thy will, O my God."

Or do other questions involuntarily arise? What was the nature of his happiness while "absent from the body?" What the scenery of that bright abode? Had he mingled in the goodly fellowship of prophets? Had he conversed with Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob? Was his spirit stationary—hovering with a brotherhood of spirits within some holy limit—or, was he permitted to travel

far and near in errands of love and mercy? Had Bethany been revisited during that mysterious interval? Had he been the unseen witness of the tears and groans of his anguished sisters?

But hush, too, these vain inquiries. We dare not give rein to imagination where Inspiration is silent. There is a designed mystery about the circumstantials of a future state. Its scenery and locality we know nothing of. It is revealed to us only in its *character*. We are permitted to approach its gates, and to read the surmounting inscription,—"Without *holiness* no man shall see the Lord." Further we cannot go. Be it ours, like Lazarus, to attain a meetness for heaven, by becoming more and more like Lazarus' Redeemer! "*We shall be* LIKE HIM," is the brief but comprehensive Bible description of that glorious world. Saviour-like *here*, we shall have heaven begun on earth, and lying down like Lazarus in the sweet sleep of death, when our Lord comes, on the great day-dawn of immortality, we shall be satisfied when we awake in *His likeness!*

"He that was dead rose up and spoke—He spoke!
Was it of that majestic world unknown?
Those words which first the bier's dread silence broke—
Came they with revelation in each tone?

Were the far cities of the nations gone,
The solemn halls of consciousness or sleep,
For man uncurtain'd by that spirit lone,
Back from the portal summon'd o'er the deep?
Be hush'd, my soul! the veil of darkness lay
Still drawn; therefore thy Lord called back the voice departed,
To spread His truth, to comfort the weak-hearted;
Not to reveal the mysteries of its way.
Oh! take that lesson home in silent faith;
Put on submissive strength to *meet*, not *question* DEATH."

XVII.

The Box of Ointment.

ONCE more we visit in thought a peaceful and happy home-scene in the same Bethany household. The severed links in that broken chain are again united.

How often in a time of severe bereavement, when some "light of the dwelling" has suddenly been extinguished, does the imagination fondly dwell on the possibility of the wild dream of separation passing away; of the vacant seat being refilled by its owner—the "loved and lost one" again restored. Alas! in all such cases, it is but a feverish vision, destined to know no fulfilment. Here, however, it was indeed a happy reality. "Lazarus is dead!" was the bitter dirge a few brief weeks ago; but now, "Lazarus lives." His silent voice is heard again—his dull eye is lighted

again—the temporary pang of separation is only remembered to enhance the joy of so gladsome a reunion.

It was on a Sabbath evening, the last Sabbath but one of the waning Jewish dispensation, when Spring's loveliness was carpeting the Mount of Olives and clothing with fresh verdure the groves around Bethany, that our blessed Redeemer was seen approaching the haunt of former friendship. He had for two months taken shelter from the malice of the Sanhedrim in the little town of Ephraim and the mountainous region of Perea, on the other side of the Jordan. But the Passover solemnity being at hand, and his own hour having come, he had "set His face steadfastly to go to Jerusalem." It is more than probable that for several days He had been travelling in the company of other pilgrims coming from Galilee on their way to the feast. He seems, however, to have left the festival caravan at Jericho, lingering behind with his own disciples in order to secure a private approach to the city of solemnities. They were completing their journey on the Sabbath referred to just as the sun was sinking behind the brow of

Olivet, and, turning aside from the highway, they spent the night in their old Bethany retreat. Befitting tranquil scene for His closing Sabbath—a happy preparation for a season of trial and conflict! It is well worthy of observation, how, as His saddest hours were drawing near—the shadow of His cross projected on His path—Bethany becomes more and more endeared to Him. Night after night, during this memorable week, we shall find Him resorting to its cherished seclusion. As the storm is fast gathering, the vessel seeks for shelter in its best-loved haven.*

Imagine the joy with which the announcement would be received by the inmates—"Our Lord and Redeemer is once more approaching." Imagine how the great Conqueror of death would be welcomed into the home consecrated alike by His love and power. Now every tear dried! The weeping that endured for the long night of bereavement all forgotten. Ah! if Jesus were loved before in that happy home, how, we may well imagine, would

* As the Jewish Sabbath began at six o'clock on Friday evening, and lasted till six on Saturday evening, we may infer it was after the close of its sacred hours (at "eventide") He reached Bethany.

He be adored and reverenced now. What a new claim had He established on their deepest affection and regard. Feelingly alive to all they owed Him, the restored brother and rejoicing sisters with hearts overflowing with gratitude could say, in the words of their Psalmist King—"Thou hast put off my sackcloth, and girded me with gladness, to the end that my glory may sing praise to thee, and not be silent. O Lord my God, I will give thanks unto thee for ever!"

But does the love and affection of that household find expression in nothing but words? Supper is being made ready. While Martha, with her wonted activity, is busied preparing the evening meal—doing her best to provide for the refreshment of the travellers—the gentle spirit of Mary (even if her name had not been given, we should have known it was she) prompts her to a more significant proof of the depth of her gratitude. Some fragrant ointment of spikenard—contained, as we gather from the other Evangelists, in a box of Alabaster—had been procured by her at great cost;* either obtained for this anticipated meeting

* It is supposed to have been equivalent to £10 of our money.

with her Lord, or it may in some way have fallen into her possession, and been sacredly kept among her treasured gifts till some befitting occasion occurred for its employment. Has not that occasion occurred now? On whom can her grateful heart more joyously bestow this garnered treasure than on her beloved Lord. With her own hands she pours it on His feet. Stooping down, she wipes them, in further token of her devotion, with her loosened tresses, till the whole apartment was filled with the sweet perfume.

And what was it that constituted the value of this tribute—the beauty and expressiveness of the action? *She gave her Lord the best thing she had!* She felt that to Him, in addition to what He had done for her own soul, she owed the most valued life in the world.

"Her eyes are homes of silent prayer,
Nor other thought her mind admits;
But, he was dead, and there he sits,
And He that brought him back is there.

"Then one deep love doth supersede
All other, when her ardent gaze
Roves from the living brother's face
And rests upon the Life indeed.

"All subtle thought, all curious fears,
Borne down by gladness so complete;
She bows, she bathes the Saviour's feet
With costly spikenard and with tears." *

What a lesson for us! Are we willing to give our Lord the best of what we have—to consecrate time, talents, strength, life, to His service? Not as many, to give Him the mere dregs and sweepings of existence—the wrecks of a "worn and withered love"—but, like Mary, anxious to take every opportunity and occasion of testifying the depth of obligation under which we are laid to Him? Let us not say—"My sphere is lowly, my means are limited, my best offerings would be inadequate." Such, doubtless, were the very feelings of that humble, diffident, yet loving one, as she crept noiselessly to where her pilgrim-Lord reclined, and lavished on His weary limbs the costliest treasure she possessed. Hundreds of more imposing deeds—more princely and munificent offerings—may have been left unrecorded by the Evangelists; but "wherever this Gospel shall be preached, in the whole world, there shall also this

* Tennyson.

that this woman hath done be told for a memorial of her." *

Would that love to "that same Jesus" were with all of us more paramount than it is! "Lovest thou Me *more than these*" is His own searching test and requirement. Is it so?—Do we love Him more than self or sin—more than friends or home—more than any earthly object or earthly good; and are we willing, if need be, to make a sacrifice for His glory and for the honour of His cause? Happy for us if it be so. There will be a joy in the very consciousness of making the effort, feeble and unworthy as it may be, for His sake, and in

* An excellent Christian poet has thus amplified this thought:—

"Thou hast thy record in the monarch's hall,
And on the waters of the far mid sea;
And where the mighty mountain shadows fall,
The Alpine hamlet keeps a thought of thee.
Where'er, beneath some Oriental tree,
The Christian traveller rests—where'er the child
Looks upward from the English mother's knee,
With earnest eyes, in wond'ring reverence mild,
There art thou known. Where'er the Book of Light
Bears hope and healing, there, beyond all blight,
Is borne thy memory—and all praise above.
Oh! say what deed so lifted thy sweet name,
Mary! to that pure, silent place of fame?—
One lowly offering of exceeding love."

acknowledgment of the great love wherewith He hath loved us.

> "Thrice blest, whose lives are faithful prayers,
> Whose loves in higher Love endure;
> Whose souls possess themselves so pure,
> Or is there blessedness like theirs?"

Let it be our privilege and delight to give Him our pound of spikenard, whatever that may be; and if we can give no other, let us offer the fragrant perfume of holy hearts and holy lives. *That* religion is always best which reveals itself by its effects—by kindness, gentleness, amiability, unselfishness, flowing from a principle of grateful love to Him who, though unseen, has been to us as to the family of Bethany—Friend, and Help, and Guide, and Portion. Mary's honour was great to anoint her Lord, but the lowliest and humblest of His people may do the same. We may have no aromatic offering, neither "gold, nor frankincense, nor myrrh;" but My son, My daughter, "give Me thine heart." "The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and a contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise."

Nor ought we to forget our blessed Lord's reply, when Judas objected to the waste of the ointment —"Let her alone; . . . . the poor ye have always with you, *but Me ye have not always.*" Let us seek to make the most of our Lord's visits while we have Him. The visits of Jesus to Bethany were soon to be over;—so also with us. He will not always linger on our thresholds, if our souls refuse to receive Him, or yield Him nothing but coldness and ingratitude in return for His love. "Me ye have not always." Soon may sickness incapacitate for active service! Soon may opportunities for doing good be gone, and gone for ever! Soon may death overtake us, and the alabaster box be left behind, unused and unemployed; the dying regret on our lips—"Oh that I had done more while I lived for this most precious Saviour! but opportunities of testifying my gratitude to Him are now gone beyond recall." Good deeds performed on Gospel motives, though unknown and unvalued by the world, will not go unrecompensed or unowned by Him who values the cup of cold water given in His name. "God is not unmindful to forget our work of faith and our labour of love."

The Lamb's Book of Life registers every such deed of lowly piety; and on the Great Day of account "it shall be produced to our eternal honour, and rewarded with a reward of grace, though not of debt."

Let us bear in mind, also, that every holy service of unostentatious love exercises a hallowed influence on those around us. We may not be conscious of such. But, if Christians indeed, the sphere in which we move will, like the Bethany home, be redolent with the ointment perfume. A holy life is a silent witness for Jesus—an incense-cloud from the heart-altar, breathing odours and sweet spices, of which the world cannot fail to take knowledge. Yes! were we to seek for a beautiful allegorical representation of pure and undefiled Religion, we would find it in this loveliest of inspired pictures. Mary—all silent and submissive at the feet of her Lord—only permitting her love to be disclosed by the holy perfume which, unknown to herself, revealed to others the reality and intensity of her love. True religion is quiet, unobtrusive, seeking the shade—its ever-befitting attitude at the feet of Jesus, looking to Him as all

in all. Yet, though retiring, it *must* and *will* manifest its living and influential power. The heart broken at the cross, like Mary's broken box, begins from that hour to give forth the hallowed perfume of faith, and love, and obedience, and every kindred grace. Not a fitful and vacillating love and service, but *ever* emitting the fragrance of holiness, till the little world of home influence around us is filled with the odour of the ointment.

"I ask Thee for the daily strength,
To none that ask denied;
And a mind to blend with outward life,
While keeping by Thy side;
Content to fill a little space
If Thou be glorified.

"And if some things I do not ask
In my cup of blessings be,
I would have my spirit fill'd the more
With grateful love to Thee—
More careful not to serve Thee *much*,
But to please Thee perfectly."

Such is a brief sketch of this beautiful domestic scene, and its main practical lessons, — a green spot on which the eye will ever love to repose, among the "Memories of Bethany." It is un-

necessary to advert to the controverted question, as to whether the description of the anointing, which took place in the house of Simon the leper (as recorded in Matt. xxvi. 6–14, and Mark xiv. 3), and where the alabaster box is spoken of, be identical with this passage, or whether they refer to two distinct occasions. The question is of no great importance in itself — the former view (that they are descriptions of one and the same event) seems the more probable. It surely gives a deep intensity to the interest of the narrative to imagine the Leper and the raised dead man, seated at the same table together with their common Deliverer, glorifying their Saviour-God, with bodies and spirits they felt now to be doubly *His!* Simon, it is evident, must have been cured of his disease, else, by the Jewish law, he dared not have been associating with his friends at a common meal. How was he cured? How else may we suppose was that inveterate malady subdued but by the omnipotent word of *Him*, who had only to say,—"I will, be thou made whole!" May we not regard him as a standing miracle of Jesus' power over the diseased body, as Lazarus

was the living trophy of His power over death and the grave. The one could testify,—"This poor man cried, and the Lord saved him, and delivered him out of all his troubles." The other,—"Unless the Lord had been my help, my soul must now have dwelt in silence!"

In order to explain the circumstance of this family meeting being in the house of *Simon*, there have not been wanting advocates for the supposition, that the restored leper may have been none other than the *parent* of the household.* It is not for us to hazard conjectures, where Scripture has thrown no light. Even when sanctioned by venerated names, the most plausible hypothesis should be received with that caution requisite in dealing with what is supported exclusively by traditional authority. Were, however, such a view as we have indicated correct (which is just possible, and there is nothing in the face of the narrative to render it *improbable*), it certainly would impart a new and fresh beauty to the picture of this Feast of gratitude. Well might the *parent's* heart swell within him with more than ordinary emotions! *Himself*

* This was a common opinion among the Fathers of the Church.

plucked a victim from the most loathsome of diseases! He would think, with tearful eye, of the dark dungeon of his banishment—the lazar-house, where he had been gloomily excluded from all fellowship with human sympathies and loving hearts. His own children condemned by a severe but righteous necessity to shun his presence—or when within sound of human footfall or human voice, compelled to make known his presence with the doleful utterance,—"Unclean! Unclean!" He would think of that wondrous moment in his history, when, shunned by *man*, the GOD-MAN drew near to him, and with one glance of His love, and one utterance of His power, He bade the foul disease for ever away!

Nor was this all that Simon (if he *were*, indeed, the father of the family) must have felt. What must have been those emotions, too deep for utterance, as he gazed on the son of his affections, seated once more by his side! A short time ago, Lazarus had been laid silent in the adjoining sepulchre—Death had laid his cold hand upon him—the pride of his home had been swept down. But the same Almighty friend who had caused his

own leprosy to depart, had given him back his lost one. They were rejoicing together in the presence of Him to whom they owed life and all its blessings. Oh, well might "the voice of rejoicing and salvation be heard in the tabernacles of these righteous!" Well might the head of the household dictate to Mary to "bring forth their best" and bestow it on their Deliverer—the costliest gift which the dwelling contained—the prized and valued box of alabaster, and pour its contents on His feet! We can imagine the burden, if not the words, of their joint anthem of praise,—"Bless the Lord, O our souls, and forget not all his benefits, who forgiveth all our iniquities, who healeth all our diseases, who redeemeth our lives from destruction, and crowneth us with loving-kindness and with tender mercy."

But be all this as it may, that same great Physician of Souls still waits to be gracious. He healeth ALL our diseases. Young and old, rich and poor, every type of spiritual malady has in Him and His salvation its corresponding cure. The same Lord is rich to all that call upon Him. The ardent Martha, the contemplative Mary, the

aged Simon, Lazarus the loving and beloved—He has proved friend, and help, and Saviour to *all;* and in their several ways they seek to give expression to the depth of their gratitude. Happy home! may there be many such amongst us! Fathers, brothers, sisters, "loving one another with a pure heart fervently," and loving Jesus more than all—and themselves in Jesus! Seeking to have *Him* as the ever-welcomed guest of their dwelling —feeling that all they *have*, and all they *are*, for time or for eternity, they owe to *Him* who has "brought them out of the horrible pit, and out of the miry clay, and set their feet upon a rock, and established their goings, and put a new song in their mouth, even praise unto our God!"

Yes! having the Lord, we have what is better and more enduring than the best of earthly ties and earthly homes. This must have been impressed with peculiar force on aged John, as in distant Ephesus he penned the memories of this evening feast. Where were *then* all its guests?—the recovered leper, the risen Lazarus, the devout sisters, the ardent disciples—all *gone!*—none but himself remained to tell the touching story. *Nay, not* all!

—ONE remained amid this wreck of buried friendship—the adorable Being who had given to that Bethany feast all its imperishable interest was still within him and about him. The rocky shores of Patmos, and the groves around Ephesus, echoed to the well-remembered tones of the same voice of love. His *best Friend* was still left to take loneliness from his solitude. He writes as if he were still reclining on that sacred bosom—"Truly our fellowship *is* with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ!"

Reader! take "that same Jesus" now as your Friend—receive Him as the guest of your soul; and when other guests and other friendships are vanished and gone, and you may be left like John, as the alone survivor of a buried generation;—"alone! you will yet be *not* alone!"—lifting your furrowed brow and tearful eye to Heaven, you may exclaim, "Who shall separate me from the love of Christ?"

XVIII.

Palm Branches.

We have just been contemplating a beautiful episode in the Bethany Memories—a gleam amid gathering clouds. *Martha*, *Mary*, and *Lazarus!* With what happy hearts did they hail the presence of their Lord on the evening of that Jewish Sabbath! Little did they anticipate the events impending. Little did they dream that their Almighty Deliverer and Friend would that day week be sleeping in His own grave!

These were indeed eventful hours on which they had now entered. The stir through Palestine of the thousands congregating in the earthly Jerusalem to the great Paschal Feast, was but a feeble type of the profound interest with which myriad angel-worshippers in the Jerusalem above were gathering to witness the offering of the True

Paschal Sacrifice, "the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world."

On the morning after the supper at Bethany (probably that of our Sabbath), the Saviour rose from His couch of needed rest to approach Jerusalem. The reserve hitherto maintained as to His kingly power is now to be set aside. "The hour is come in which the Son of man is to be glorified." BETHANY is one of the few places associated with recollections of the Redeemer's royalty. The "despised and rejected" is, for once, the honoured and exalted. It is a glimpse of the crown before He ascends the cross; a foreshadowing of that blessed period when He shall be hailed by the loud acclaim of earth's nations—the Gentile hosannah mingling with the Hebrew hallelujah in welcoming Him to the throne of universal empire.

Multitudes of the assembled pilgrims in the city, who had heard of His arrival, crowded out to Bethany to witness the mysterious Being, whose deeds of mercy and miracle had now become the universal theme of converse. His mightiest prodigy of power in the resurrection of Lazarus had invested His name and person with surpassing interest. We

need not wonder, therefore, that "the town of Mary and her sister Martha" should attract many worshippers from Jerusalem, to behold with their own eyes at once the restored villager and his Divine Deliverer! In fulfilment of Zechariah's prophecy, the meek and lowly Nazarene, seated on no caparisoned war-horse, but on an unbroken colt, and surrounded with the multitude, sets forth on His journey.* "The village and the desert were then all alive (as they still are once every year at the Greek Easter) with the crowd of Paschal pilgrims moving to and fro between Bethany and Jerusalem. . . . . Three pathways lead, and probably always led, from Bethany; . . . . . one a long circuit over the northern shoulder of Mount Olivet, down the valley which parts it from Scopus; another, a steep footpath over the summit; the third, the natural continuation of the road by which mounted travellers always approach the city from Jericho, over the southern shoulder between the summit which contains the Tombs of the Prophets, and that called the 'Mount of Offence.' There can be no doubt that this last is the road

* Mark xi. 1–12.

of the entry of Christ, not only because, as just stated, it is, and must always have been, the usual approach for horsemen and for large caravans such as then were concerned, but also because this is the only one of the three approaches which meets the requirements of the narrative which follows. . . . . This is the only one approach which is really grand. It is the approach by which the army of Pompey advanced, the first European army that ever confronted it. Probably the first impression of every one coming from the north-west and the south may be summed up in the simple expression used by one of the modern travellers—'I am strangely affected, but greatly disappointed!' But no human being could be disappointed who first saw Jerusalem from the east. The beauty consists in this, that you then burst at once on the two great ravines which cut the city off from the surrounding table-land.

. . . . . .

"Two vast streams of people met on that day. The one poured out from the city, and as they came through the gardens whose clusters of palms rose on the south-eastern corner of Olivet,

they cut down the long branches, as was their wont at the Feast of Tabernacles, and moved upwards towards Bethany with loud shouts of welcome. From Bethany streamed forth the crowds who had assembled there on the previous night, and who came testifying to the great event at the sepulchre of Lazarus. The road soon loses sight of Bethany. It is now a rough, but still broad and well-defined mountain track, winding over rock and loose stones, —a steep declivity below on the left; the sloping shoulder of Olivet above on the right. Along this road the multitudes threw down the branches which they cut as they went along, or spread out a rude matting formed of the palm branches they had already cut as they came out. The larger portion (those perhaps who escorted Him from Bethany) unwrapped their loose cloaks from their shoulders, and stretched them along the rough path, to form a momentary carpet as he approached. The two streams met midway. Half of the vast mass, turning round, preceded; the other half followed. Gradually the long procession swept up and over the ridge, where first begins the 'descent of the Mount of Olives,' towards Jerusalem. At

this point the first view is caught of the south-eastern corner of the city. The Temple and the more northern portions are hid by the slope of Olivet on the right; what is seen is only Mount Zion, covered with houses to its base, surmounted by the castle of Herod on the supposed site of the palace of David, from which that portion of Jerusalem, emphatically 'The City of David,' derived its name. It was at this precise point, as he drew near, at the descent of the Mount of Olives, (may it not have been from the sight thus opening upon them?) that the shout of triumph burst forth from the multitude—'Hosannah to the Son of David! Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord! Blessed is the kingdom that cometh of our father David. Hosannah—Peace—Glory in the highest!' There was a pause as the shout rang through the long defile; and as the Pharisees who stood by in the crowd complained, He pointed to the 'stones,' which, strewn beneath their feet, would immediately 'cry out' if 'these were to hold their peace.' Again the procession advanced. The road descends a slight declivity, and the glimpse of the city is again withdrawn

behind the intervening ridge of Olivet. A few moments, and the path mounts again, it climbs a rugged ascent, it reaches a ledge of smooth rock, and in an instant the whole city bursts into view. As now the dome of the Mosque El Aksa rises like a ghost from the earth before the traveller stands on the ledge, so then must have risen the Temple Tower; as now the vast enclosure of the Mussulman Sanctuary, so then must have spread the Temple Courts; as now the gray town on its broken hills, so then the magnificent city with its background (long since vanished away) of gardens and suburbs on the western plateau behind. Immediately below was the valley of the Kedron, here seen in its greatest depth, as it joins the valley of Hinnom; and thus giving full effect to the great peculiarity of Jerusalem, seen only on its eastern side—its situation as of a city rising out of a deep abyss. It is hardly possible to doubt that this rise and turn of the road (this rocky ledge) was the exact point where the multitude paused again, and 'He, when He beheld the city, wept over it.' . . . . . Here the Lord stayed His onward march, and here His eyes beheld what is

still the most impressive view which the neighbourhood of Jerusalem furnishes—and the tears rushed forth at the sight." *

Without dwelling longer on this splendid ovation, we may only further remark, that had the Redeemer's mission been on (the infidel theory) a successful imposture, what an opportunity now to have availed Himself of that outburst of popular fervour, and to have marched straight to take possession of the hereditary throne of David. The populace were evidently more than ready to second any such attempt; the Sanhedrim and Jewish authorities must have trembled for the result. The hosannas, borne on the breeze from the slope of Olivet, could not fail to sound ominous of coming disaster. So incontrovertible indeed had been the proof of Lazarus' resurrection, that only the most blinded bigotry could refuse to own in that marvellous act the divinity of Jesus. In addition, too, to this last crowning demonstration of omnipotence, there were hundreds, we may well believe, in that procession, who, in different parts of Pa-

* Stanley's "Sinai and Palestine," p. 188-191. A work of rare interest, which condenses in one volume the literature of the Holy Land.

lestine, had listened to His gracious words, and witnessed His gracious deeds. What *other*, what *better* Messiah could they wish than this — combining the might of Godhead with the kindness and tenderness of a human philanthropist and friend? Is He to accept of the crown? Nay, by a lofty abnegation of self, and all selfish considerations, He illustrates the announcement made by Him, a few hours later, in Pilate's judgment-hall, as to the leading characteristic of that empire He is to set up in the hearts of men—"My kingdom is not of this world." He was, indeed, one day to be hailed alike King of Zion and King of Nations, but a bitter baptism of blood and suffering had meanwhile to be undergone. No glitter of earthly honour—no carnal dreams of earthly glory —would divert Him from His divine and gracious undertaking. He would save *others*—Himself He *would* not save.

Let us pause for a moment, and ponder that significant chorus of praise which on Olivet arose to the Lord of Glory. How interesting to think of the vast and varied multitude gathered around the Conqueror! Many, doubtless, assembled from

curiosity, who had never seen Him before, and had only heard of His fame in their distant homes; others, from feelings of personal love and gratitude, were blending their voices in the shout of welcome. Think, it may be, of Bartimeus, now gazing with his unsealed eyes on his Divine Deliverer. Think of Mary Magdalene, her heart gushing at the remembrance of her own sin and shame, and her adorable Redeemer's pardoning and forgiving mercy! Nicodemus, perhaps, no longer seeking to repair by stealth, under the shadow of night, to hold a confidential meeting; but in the full blaze of day, and before assembled Israel, boldly recognising in "the Teacher sent from God" the promised Messiah, the Prince of Peace, the Redeemer of Mankind. Shall we think of Lazarus too, fearless of his own personal safety, venturing to follow his guest with tearful eye, the multitude gazing with wonder on this living trophy of death? We may think of the very children, as He entered the temple, uplifting their infant voices in the general welcome—pledges of the myriad little ones who, in future ages, were to have an interest in "the kingdom of God."

"Meanwhile He paces through th' adoring crowd,
Calm as the march of some majestic cloud
That o'er wild scenes of ocean war
Holds its still course in Heaven afar.

. . . . . .

"Yet in the throng of selfish hearts untrue,
His sad eye rests upon His faithful few;
Children and child-like souls are there,
Blind Bartimeus' humble prayer;
And Lazarus, waken'd from his four days' sleep,
Enduring life again that Passover to keep." *

May not Olivet be regarded on this occasion as a type of the Church triumphant in Heaven—Jesus enthroned in the affections of a mighty multitude which no man can number—old and young, great and small, rich and poor—casting their palms of victory at His feet, and ascribing to Him all the glory of their great salvation?

Let *us* ask, have *we* received Jesus as *our* King?—have *our* palm branches been cast at His feet? Feeling that He is alike willing and mighty to save, have we joined in the rapture of praise—"Blessed is He that cometh in the name of the Lord to save us?" Have our hearts become living temples thrown open for His reception? Is this

* "Christian Year."

the motto and superscription on their portals—"This is the gate of the Lord, into which THE RIGHTEOUS ONE shall enter!" Jesus refused and disowned none of these gratulations—He spurned no voice in all that motley Jerusalem throng. There were endless diversities and phases, doubtless, of human character and history there. The once proud formalist, the once greedy extortioner, the hated tax-gatherer, the rich nobleman, the child of penury, the Roman officer, the peasant or fisherman of Galilee, the humbled publican, the woman from the city, the reclaimed victim of misery and guilt! All were there as types and samples of that diversified multitude who, in every age, were to own Him as King, and receive His gracious benediction.

We have spoken of this incident as a glimpse of glory before His sufferings. Alas! it *was* but a glimpse. What a picture of the fickleness and treachery of the heart!—That excited populace who are now shouting their hosannahs, are ere long to be raising the cry, "Crucify Him, crucify Him!" Four days hence we shall find the palm branches lying withered on the Bethany road,

and the blazing torches of an assassin-band nigh the very spot where He is now passing with an applauding retinue! "Cease ye from man, whose breath is in his nostrils."

It does not belong to our narrative to record the remaining transactions of this day in Jerusalem. The shades of evening find the Saviour once more repairing to Bethany. The evangelist *Mark*, in the course of his narrative, simply but touchingly says:—"And Jesus entered into Jerusalem, and into the temple, and when He had looked round about upon all things" (the mitred priests, the bleeding victims, the costly buildings), "and now the eventide was come, he went out unto BETHANY with the twelve." (Mark xi. 11.) As He returned to the sweet calm of that quiet home, if He could not fail to think of the hours of darkness and agony before Him, could He reap no joy or consolation in the thought, that that very day week the redemption of His people was to be consummated—the glory that surrounded the grave and resurrection of Lazarus was to be eclipsed by the marvels of His own!

XIX.

The Fig-Tree.

THE hosannahs of yesterday had died away—the memorials of its triumph were strewed on the road across Olivet—as, early on the Monday morning, while the sun was just appearing above the Mountains of Moab, the Divine Redeemer left His Bethany retreat, and was seen retraversing the well-worn path to Jerusalem. Here and there, in the "olive-bordered way," were Fig plantations. The adjoining village of Bethphage derived its name from the Green Fig.* Indeed, "fig-trees may still be seen overhanging the ordinary road from Jerusalem to Bethany, growing out of the rocks of the solid mountain, which, by the prayer of faith, might 'be removed and cast into

* Bethphage, *lit.* "the house of figs."

the (distant Mediterranean) Sea.' "* An incident connected with one of these is too intimately identified with the Redeemer's last journeys to and from the home of His friend to admit of exclusion from our "Bethany Memories." These memories have hitherto, for the most part, in connexion at least with our blessed Lord, been soothing, hallowed, encouraging. Here the "still small voice" is for once broken with sterner accents. In contrast with the bright background of other sunny pictures, we have, standing out in bold relief, a withered, sapless stem, impressively proclaiming, in unwonted utterances of wrath and rebuke, that the same hand is "strong to smite," which we have witnessed so lately in the case of Lazarus was "strong to save."

The eye of Jesus, as he traversed the rocky path with His disciples, rested on a *Fig-tree.* (Mark xi. 12, 13.) It seems not to have been growing alone, but formed part of a group or plantation on one of the slopes or ravines of Olivet. Its appearance could not fail to challenge attention. It was now only the Passover season (the month of April);

* Stanley, p. 418.

summer—the time for ripe figs—was yet distant; and as it is one of the peculiarities of the tree that the fruit appears *before* the leaves, a considerable period, in the ordinary course of nature, ought to have elapsed before the foliage was matured. Jesus Himself, it will be remembered, on another occasion, spake of the putting forth of the fig-tree leaves as an indication that "*summer* was nigh." It must have been, therefore, a strange and unusual sight which met the eye of the travellers as they gazed, in early spring, on one of these trees with its full complement of leaves—clad in full summer luxuriance. While the others in the plantation, true to the order of development, were yet bare and leafless, or else the buds of spring only flushing them with verdure, the broad leaves of this precocious (and we may think at first *favoured*) plant—the pioneer of surrounding vegetation—rustled in the morning breeze, and invited the passers-by to turn aside, examine the marvel, and pluck the fruit.

We may confidently infer that Jesus, as the Omniscient Lord of the inanimate creation, knew

well that fruit there was none under that pretentious foliage. We dare not suppose that He went expecting to find Figs; far less, that in a moment of disappointed hope, He ventured on a capricious exercise of His power, uttered a hasty malediction, and condemned the insensate boughs to barrenness and decay. The first cursory reading of the narrative may suggest some such unworthy impression. But we dismiss it at once, as strangely at variance with the Saviour's character, and strangely unlike His wonted actings. We feel assured that He literally, as well as figuratively, would not "break the bruised reed, nor quench the smoking flax." He came, in all respects, "not to destroy, but to save." Some deep inner meaning, not apparent on the surface of the inspired story, must have led Him for the moment to regard a tree in the light of a responsible agent, and to address it in words of unusual severity.

What, then, is the explanation? Our Lord on this occasion revives the old typical or picture-teaching with which the Hebrews were to that hour so familiar. He, as the greatest of prophets, adopts the significant and impressive method, not

unfrequently employed by the Seers of Israel, who, in uttering startling and solemn truths, did so by means of *symbolic actions*. As Jeremiah of old dashed the potter's vessel down the Valley of Hinnom, to indicate the judgments that were about to befall Jerusalem; or, at another time, wore around his own neck a wooden yoke, to intimate their approaching bondage under the King of Babylon; or, as Isaiah "walked naked and barefoot three years for a sign and wonder upon Egypt and Ethiopia," so did our Lord now invest a tree in dumb nature with a prophet's warning voice, and make its stripped and blighted boughs eloquent of a nation's doom!

On the height of their own Olivet, looking down, as it were, on Jerusalem, that fig-tree becomes a stern messenger of woe and vengeance to the whole house of Judah. Often before had he warned by His *words* and *tears;* now He is to make an insignificant object in the outer world take up His prophecy, and testify to the degenerate people at once the cause, the suddenness, and the certainty of their destruction! Let us join, then, the Master and His disciples, as they stand on the crest above

Bethany, and, gazing on that fruitless leaf-bearer, "hear this parable of the fig-tree."*

Jesus, on approaching it (it seemed to be at a little distance from their path), and finding abundance of leaves, but no fruit thereon, condemns it to perpetual sterility and barrenness.

A difficulty here occurs on the threshold of the narrative. If, as we have noted, and as St Mark tells us, "the time of figs was *not yet*"—why this seeming impatience—why this harsh sentence for not having what, *if found*, would have been unseasonable, untimely, abnormal?

In this apparent difficulty lies the main truth and zest of the parable. The doom of sterility, be it carefully noted, was uttered by Jesus, not so much because of the *absence of fruit*, but because the tree, by its premature display of leaves, challenged expectations which a closer inspection did not realise. "It was punished," says an able writer, "not for being without fruit, but for proclaiming, by the voice of those leaves, that it had such. Not for being barren, but for being false." †

* "If the miracles generally have a symbolical import, we have in this case one that is *entirely* symbolical."—NEANDER.

† "Trench on the Miracles," p. 444. See a full exposition of the de-

Graphic picture of boastful and vaunting Israel! This conspicuous tree, nigh one of the frequented paths of Olivet, was no inappropriate type, surely, of that nation which stood illustrious amid the world's kingdoms—exalted to heaven with unexampled privileges which it abused—proudly claiming a righteousness which, when weighed in the balances, was found utterly wanting. It mattered not that the heathen nations were as guilty, vile, and corrupt as the chosen people. Fig-trees were they, too—naked stems, fruitless and leafless; but then they made no boastful pretensions. The Jews had, in the face of the world, been glorying in a righteousness which, in reality, was only like the foliage of that tree by which the Lord and His disciples now stood—mocking the expectations of its owner by mere outward semblance and an utter absence of fruit.

The very day preceding, these mournful deficiencies had brought tears to the Saviour's eyes—stirred the depths of His yearning heart in the very hour of His triumph. He had looked down

sign and import of this miracle in this exhaustive and admirable dissertation.

from the height of the mountain on the gilded splendours of the Temple Courts beneath; but, alas! He saw that sanctimonious hypocrisy and self-righteous formalism had sheltered themselves behind clouds of incense. Mammon, covetousness, oppression, fraud, were rising like strange fire from these defiled altars!

He turns the tears of yesterday into an expressive and enduring parable to-day! He approaches a luxuriant Fig-tree, boasting great things among its fellows, and thus through *it* He addresses a doomed city and devoted land,—"O House of Israel," He seems to say, "I have come up for the last time to your highest and most ancient festival. You stand forth in the midst of the nations of the earth clothed in rich verdure. You retain intact the splendour of your ancestral ritual. You boast of your rigid adherence to its outward ceremonial, the punctilious observance of your fasts and feasts. But I have found that it is but 'a name to live.' You sinfully ignore 'the weightier matters of the law, judgment, justice, and mercy!' You call out as you tread that gorgeous fane—'The Temple of the Lord! The Temple of the Lord! The Temple

of the Lord are we!' You forget that your hearts are the Temple I prize! Holiness, the most acceptable incense—love to God, and love to man, the most pleasing sacrifice. All that dead and torpid formalism—that mockery of outward foliage—is to me nothing. 'Your new moons and Sabbaths—the calling of assemblies—I cannot away with; it is iniquity even the solemn meeting.' These are only as the whitewash of your sepulchres to hide the loathsomeness within—'the rottenness and dead men's bones!' If you had made no impious pretensions, I would not, peradventure, have dealt so sternly with you. If like the other trees you had confessed your nakedness, and stood with your leafless stems, waiting for summer suns, and dews, and rains, to fructify you, and to bring your fruit to perfection—all well; but you have sought to mock and deceive me by your falsity, and thus precipitated the doom of the cumberer. 'Henceforth, let no man eat fruit of thee for ever!'"

The unconscious Tree listened! One night only passed, and the morrow found it with drooping leaf and blighted stem! On yonder mountain crest it stood, as a sign between heaven and earth

of impending judgment. Eighteen hundred years have taken up its parable—fearfully authenticated the averments of the August Speaker! Israel, a bared, leafless, sapless trunk, testifies to this hour, before the nations, that "heaven and earth may pass away, but God's words will not pass away!" *

But does the parable stop here? Was there no voice but for the ear of Judah and Jerusalem? Have *we* no part in these solemn monitions?

Ah! be assured, as Jesus dealt with nations so will He deal with individuals. This parable-miracle solemnly speaks to all who have only a name to live—the foliage of outward profession—but who are destitute of the "fruits of righteousness." It is not neglecters or despisers—the careless—the infidel—the scorner—our Lord here addresses. He deals with such elsewhere. It is rather vaunting hypocrites—wearing the garb of religion—the trappings and dress of outward devotion to

* "The fig-tree, rich in foliage, but destitute of fruit, represents the Jewish people, so abundant in outward shows of piety, but destitute of its reality. Their vital sap was squandered upon leaves. And as the fruitless tree, failing to realise the aim of its being, was destroyed, so the theocratic nation, for the same reason, was to be overtaken, after long forbearance, by the judgments of God, and shut out from His kingdom."—NEANDER.

conceal their inward pollution; like the ivy, screening from view by garlands of fantastic beauty —wreaths of loveliest green—the mouldering trunk or loathsome ruin! We may well believe none are more obnoxious to a holy Saviour than *such.* He (Incarnate TRUTH) would rather have the naked stem than the counterfeit blossom. He would rather have no gold than be mocked with tinsel and base alloy! "I *would,*" says He, speaking to one of His Churches at a later time, "I would thou wert cold or hot." He would rather a man openly avowed his enmity than that he should come in disguise, with a traitor-heart, among the ranks of His people. Oh that all such ungodly boasters and pretenders would bear in mind, that not only do they inflict harm on themselves, but they do infinite damage to the Church of God. They lower the standard of godliness. Like that worthless Fig-tree, they help to hide out from others the glorious sunlight. They intercept from others the refreshing dews of heaven. They absorb in their leaves the rains as they fall. Many a tuft of tiny moss, many a lowly plant at their feet, is pining and withering, which, *but* for

them, would be bathing its tints in sunshine, and filling the air with balmy fragrance!

Solemn, then, ought to be the question with every one of us—every Fig-tree in the Lord's plantation—How does it stand with *me?* am I *now* bringing forth fruit to God? for remember what we are NOW, will fix what we *shall* be when our Lord shall come on the Great Day of Scrutiny! We are forming *now* for Eternity; settling down and consolidating in the great mould which ultimately will determine our everlasting state; fruitless *now*, we shall be fruitless *then*. The *principle* in the future retribution is thus laid down—"He that is unjust, let him be unjust still; and he which is filthy, let him be filthy still." The demand and scrutiny of Jesus will on that day be, not what is the number of your leaves, the height of your stem, the extent of your branches? not whether you have grown on the wayside or in the forest, been nurtured in solitude or in a crowd, on the mountain-height or in the lowly valley: all will resolve itself into the *one question*—Where is your *fruit?* What evidence is there that you have profited by My admonitions, listened to My voice,

and accepted My salvation? Where are your proofs of love to Myself, delight in My service, obedience to My will? Where are the sins you have crucified, the sacrifices you have made, the new principles you have nurtured, the amiability and love and kindness and generosity and unselfishness which have supplanted and superseded baser affections? See that the leaves of outward profession be not a snare to you. You may be lulling yourselves to sleep with delusive opiates. You may be making these false coverings an apology for resisting the "putting on of the armour of light." One has no difficulty in persuading the tenant of a wretched hovel to consent to have his mud-hut taken down; but the man who has the walls of his dwelling hung with gaudy drapery, it is hard to persuade him that his house is worthless and his foundation insecure. Think not that privileges or creeds, or church-sect or church-membership, or the Shibboleth of party will save you. It is to the *heart* that God looks. If the inner spirit be right, the outer conduct will be fruitful in righteousness. Make it not your worthless ambition to APPEAR to be holy, but *be* holy! Live not a

"dying life"—that blank existence which brings neither glory to God nor good to men. Seek that *while* you live, the world may be the better for you, and when you die the world may miss you. Unlike the pretentious tree in our parable-text, be it yours rather to have the nobler character and recompense, so beautifully delineated under a similar figure three thousand years ago—"He shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water, that bringeth forth his fruit in his season. His leaf, also, shall not wither, and whatsoever he doeth shall prosper."*

Let us further learn, from this solemn and impressive miracle, how true Christ is to His word. We think of Him as true to His *promises*, do we think of Him, also, as *true to His threatenings?* Judgment, indeed, is His strange work. Amid a multitude of other prodigies already performed by Him, this "cursing" of the fig-tree formed the alone exception to His miracles of *mercy*.† All the others were proofs and illustrations of bene-

* Psalm i. 3.

† "In that of the devils in the swine there was no punishment, but only a permitting of the thing."—See "Stier's Words of the Lord Jesus," vol. iii. p. 100.

ficence, compassion, love. But He seems to interpose *this* ONE, in case we should forget, in the affluence of benignity and kindness, that the same God, whose name and memorial is "merciful and gracious," has solemnly added that "He can by no means clear the guilty." He would have us to remember that there is a point beyond which even *His* love cannot go, when the voice of ineffable *Goodness* must melt and merge into tones of stern wrath and vengeance. The guilty may, for the brief earthly hour of their impenitence, affect to despise His divine warnings, laugh to scorn His solemn expostulations. Sentence may not be executed speedily; amazing patience may ward off the descending blow. They may, from the very *forbearance* of Jesus, take impious encouragement to defy His threats, and rush swifter to their own destruction. But come He *will* and *must* to assert His claims as "He that is HOLY, He that is TRUE." The disciples, on the present occasion, heard the voice of their Master. They gazed on the doomed Fig-tree, but there seemed at the moment to be no visible change on its leaves. As they took their final glance ere passing on their way, no blight

seemed to descend, no worm to prey on its roots. The fowls of Heaven may have appeared soaring in the sky, eager to nestle as before on its branches, and to bathe their plumage on the dew-drops that drenched its foliage. But was the word of Jesus in vain? Did that fig-tree take up a responsive parable, and say, "Who made Thee a ruler and a judge over me?"

The Lord and His apostles passed the place a few hours afterwards on their return to Bethany.* But though the Passover moon was shining on their path, the darkness, and perhaps the distance from the highway, veiled from their view the too truthful doom to be revealed in morning light. As the dawn of day (Tuesday) finds them once more on their road to Jerusalem, the eyes of the disciples wander towards the spot to see whether the words of yesterday have proved to be indeed solemn verities. One glance is enough! *There* it stands in impressive memorial. One night had done the work. No desert simoom, if it had passed over it, could have effected it more thoroughly. Its leaves were shrivelled, its sap dried, its glory gone. Ever

* Mark xi. 19.

and anon afterwards, as the disciples crossed the mountain, and as they gazed on this silent "preacher," they would be reminded that Jehovah-Jesus, their loving Master, was not "a man that He should lie, nor the son of man that he should repent."

Ah! Reader, learn from all this, that the wrathful utterances of the Saviour are no idle threats. He *means* what He *says!* He is "the Faithful and True witness;" and though "mercy and truth go continually before His face," "justice and judgment are the habitation of His throne." You may be scorning His message—lulling yourself into a dream of guilty indifference. You may see in His daily dealings no sign or symbol of coming retribution; you may be echoing the old challenge of the presumptuous scoffer—"Where is the promise of His coming?" The fig leaves may have lost none of their verdure—the sky may be unfretted by one vengeful cloud—nature, around you, may be hushed and still. You can hear no footsteps of wrath; you may be even tempted at times to think that all is a dream—that credulity has suffered itself to be duped by a counterfeit tale of

superstitious terror! Or if, in better moments, you awake to a consciousness of the Bible averments being stern realities, your next subterfuge is to trust to that rope of sand to which thousands have clung, to the wreck of their eternities—an indefinite dreamy hope in the final *mercy* of God! that on the Great Day the threatenings of Jesus will undergo some modification; that He will not carry out to the very letter the full weight of His denunciations; that the arm which love nailed to the cross of Calvary will sheathe the sword of avenging retribution, and proclaim a universal amnesty to the thronging myriads at His tribunal!

"Nay! O man, who art thou that repliest against God?" Come to the fig-tree "over against" Bethany, and let it be a dumb attesting witness to the Saviour's unswerving and immutable truthfulness! Or, passing from the sign to the thing symbolised, behold that nation which God has for eighteen centuries set up in the world as a monument of His undeviating adherence to His Word. See how, in their case, to the letter He has fulfilled His threatenings. Is not this fulfilment intended as an awful foreshadowing of eternal veri-

ties: if He has "spared not the natural branches," thinkest thou He will spare *thee?* "If these things were done in the green tree, what will be done in the dry?"

Mourners! You for whose comfort these pages are specially designed, is there no lesson of consolation to be drawn from this solemn "memory?" Jesus smote down that *fig-tree*—blasted and blighted it. Never again did He come to seek fruit on it. Ten thousand other buds in the Fig-forest around were opening their fragrant lips to drink in the refreshing dews of spring; but the curse of perpetual sterility rested on this!

He has smitten *you* also, but it is only to *heal!* He has bared your branches—stripped you of your verdure—broken "your staff and your beautiful rod;" but the pruning hook has been used to promote the Vigour of the tree; to lop off the redundant branches, and open the stems to the gladsome sunlight. Murmur not! Remember, *but for* these loppings of affliction you might have effloresced into the rank luxuriant growth of mere external profession. You might have rested satisfied with the outward display of *Religious-*

ness, without the fruits of true *Religion*. You might have lived and died unproductive *cumberers*, deceiving others and deceiving yourselves. But He would not suffer you to linger in this state of worthless barrenness. Oh! better far, surely, these severest cuttings and incisions of the pruning knife, than to listen to the stern words—"Ephraim is joined to his idols, let him alone!" It is the most terrible of all judgments when God leaves a sinner undisturbed in his sinfulness—abandons him to "the fruit of his own ways, and to be filled with his own devices;" until, like a tree impervious to moistening dews and fructifying heat, he dwarfs and dwindles into the last hopeless stage of spiritual decay and death!

"If ye endure chastening, God dealeth with you as with sons; for what son is he whom the Father chasteneth not?"

"He purgeth it (*pruneth it*), that it may bring forth MORE FRUIT."

XX.

Closing Hours.

THE evenings of the two succeeding days seem to have closed around our adorable Lord at BETHANY. We may still follow Him in imagination, in the mellow twilight, as He and His disciples crossed the bridle-path of the holy mountain from Jerusalem to the house and village of His friend.

Much has changed since then; but the great features of unvarying nature retain their imperishable outlines, so that what still arrests the view of the modern traveller, in crossing the Mount of Olives, we know must have formed the identical landscape spread out before the eyes of the Incarnate Redeemer. It is more than allowable, therefore, to appropriate the words of the same trustworthy recent spectator, from whose pages we have already quoted, as presenting a truthful and veritable picture of what the Saviour *then* saw.

From almost every point in the journey, there

would be visible "the long purple wall of the Moab mountains, rising out of its unfathomable depths; these mountains would then have almost the effect of a distant view of the sea, the hues constantly changing; this or that precipitous rock coming out clear in the evening shade—*there* the form of what may possibly be Pisgah, dimly shadowed out by surrounding valleys—*here* the point of Kerak, the capital of Moab, and future fortress of the Crusaders—and then, at times all wrapt in deep haze, the mountains overhanging the valley of the shadow of death, all the more striking from their contrast with the gray or green colours of the hills through which a glimpse was caught of them."*

We have no recorded incidents in connexion with these two nights at Bethany. We are left only to realise in thought the refreshment alike for body and spirit our Lord enjoyed. Exhausted with the fatigues of each day, and the advancing storm-cloud ready to burst on His devoted head, we may well imagine how grateful repose would be in the old homestead of congenial friendship.

* "Sinai and Palestine," p. 165.

The last evening He spent at the "Palm-clad Village" must in many ways have been full of sorrowing thoughts. He had, in the afternoon, on His return from Jerusalem, when seated with his disciples "over against the Temple," gazing on its doomed magnificence, been discoursing on the appalling desolation which awaited that loved and time-honoured sanctuary. This had led Him to the more sublime and terrific theme of a Day of Judgment. Not only did He foresee the grievous obduracy of His own infatuated countrymen, but His Omniscient eye, travelling down to the consummation of all things, wept over the fate of myriads, who, in spite of atoning love and mercy, were to despise and perish.

He left the threshold, consecrated so oft by His Pilgrim steps, on the Thursday of that week, not to return again till death had numbered Him among its victims. On that same morning He had sent His disciples into the city to make preparation for the keeping of the Passover Supper. He Himself followed, probably towards the afternoon, and joined them in "the Upper room," where, after celebrating for the last time the old Jewish

rite, he instituted the New Testament memorial of His own dying love. Supper being ended, the disciples, probably, contemplated nothing but a return, as on preceding evenings, by their old route to Bethany. Singing their paschal hymn, they descended the Jehoshaphat ravine, by the side of the Temple. The brook Kedron was crossed, and they are once more on the Bethany path. They have reached Gethsemane; their Master retires into the depths of the olive grove, as was often His wont, to hold secret communion with His Father. But the crisis-hour has at last arrived! The Shepherd is about to be smitten, and the sheep to be scattered! Rude hands arrest Him on His way. In vain shall Lazarus and his sisters wait for their expected Lord! For *Him* that night there is no voice of earthly comforter—no couch of needed rest;—when the shadows of darkness have gathered around Bethany, and the pale passover moon is lighting up its palm-trees, the Lord of glory is standing buffetted and insulted in the hall of Annas.

The Remembrances of Bethany are here absorbed and overshadowed for a time by the darker

memories of Gethsemane and Calvary. Jesus may, indeed, afterwards revisit the loved haunt of former friendship; but meanwhile He is first to accomplish that glorious Decease, *but for which* the world could never have had on its surface one Bethany-home of love, or been cheered by one ray of happiness or hope.

In vain do we try to picture, as we revert to the peaceful Village, the feelings of Lazarus, Martha, and Mary on that day of ignominious crucifixion! *where* they were—*how* they were employed! Can we imagine that they could linger behind, unconcerned, in their dwelling, when their Best Friend was in the hands of His murderers? We cannot think so. We may rather well believe that among the tearful eyes of the weeping women that followed the innocent Victim along the "Dolorous way," not the least anguished were the two Bethany mourners; and that as He hung upon the cross, and His languid eye saw here and there a faithful friend lingering around him while disciples had fled, Lazarus would be among the few who soothed and smoothed that awful death-pillow! Perhaps even when death had sealed His eyes, and faithless

apostles gave vent to their feelings of hopeless despondency, "We trusted it had been He who should have redeemed Israel," the family of Bethany would recollect how oft He had spoken of this very hour of darkness and bereavement which had now come; Mary would, in trembling emotion, (in connexion with the humble token of her own gratitude and affection,) remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how He said, "Let her alone, against the day of my *burying* hath she done this."

We need not pursue these thoughts. We may well believe, however, that when the first day of the week had come—and the glad announcement spread from disciple to disciple, "*The Lord is risen indeed*,"—on no home in Judea would the tidings fall more welcome than on that of Lazarus of Bethany. Martha and Mary had, a few weeks before, experienced the happiness of a restored *Brother*. Now it was that of a restored *Saviour!* Whether He revisited these, His former friends, the days immediately after His resurrection, we cannot tell. It is more than probable He would. May not some hallowed *unrecorded* "Memories of Bethany" be included in the closing

words of John's gospel—"There are also many OTHER things which Jesus did?" On the way to Emmaus He joined Himself to two disciples, and "caused their hearts to burn within them as He talked by the way." So may He not have joined Himself to the friends with whom He had so oft held sacred intercourse during the days of His humiliation—breathing on them His benediction, and discoursing of those covenant blessings which He had died to purchase, and which He was about to bestow, "set as king on His holy hill of Zion." With what a new and glorious meaning to Martha must her Saviour's words have now been invested, "*I am the Resurrection and the Life*—he that believeth on Me, though he were dead, yet shall he live."

As the God-man, He had power over her brother's life—He had now demonstrated that He had "power over His own;"—"power" not only to "lay it down," but "power to take it up again." Her Lord had "spoken *once*, yea *twice* had she heard this, that *power* belongeth unto God."

The Grave of Bethany was thus in her eyes inseparably connected with the grave at Golgotha. But for the rolling away of the stone from a more

august sepulchre, her brother must still have been slumbering in the embrace of death. "But now had Christ risen from the dead, and become the first-fruits of them that slept."

The Almighty Reaper had risen Himself from the tomb, with the sharp sickle in His hand. In the person of His dearest earthly friend He presented an earnest-sheaf of the great Resurrection-reaping-time—when the mandate was to be carried to the four winds of heaven, "Put ye in the sickle, for the harvest is ripe;—Multitudes—multitudes in the Valley of Decision."

Can we participate in the joy of the family of BETHANY? Have we, like them, followed Christ to His cross and His tomb, and listened to the angelic announcement, "He is not here, He is risen?" Have we seen in His death the secret of our life? Have we beheld Him as the Great Precursor emerging from Hades, and shewing to ransomed millions the purchased path of life—the luminous highway to glory? Let our hearts be as Bethany dwellings, to welcome in a dying risen Jesus. Let us not expel Him from our souls by our sins—crucifying the Lord afresh, and putting

Him to an open shame. Let not God's restoring mercies be, as, alas! often they are to us, *unsanctified;*—receiving back our Lazarus from the brink of the tomb, but refusing, on the return of health and prosperity, to share in bearing our Lord's cross —to "go forth with Him without the camp—bearing His reproach." If He has delivered our souls from death, and our eyes from tears, be it ours to follow Him through good and through bad report. Not alone amid the hosannahs of His people, or amid the world's bright sunshine, but, if need be, to confront suffering, and trial, and death for His sake. Like the Bethany family, let us mourn His absence, and long for His return. It is but for "a little while" we "shall *not* see Him"—"again a little while and we *shall* see Him." Oh, blessed day! when the words of the old prophet will start once more into fulfilment, and a voice from Heaven will thus address a waiting Church—"Rejoice, O daughter of Zion, behold thy King cometh!" He cometh!—but it is now with no badges of humiliation—with no anticipations of sorrow and woe to mar that hour of glory. "His head shall be crowned with many crowns"—all His saints with Him to

share His triumph and enter into His joy. May we be enabled to look forward to that blessed season when, arrayed in white robes, with golden crowns on our heads, and palms of victory in our hands, these shall be cast at His feet, and the feeble Hosannahs of time shall be lost and merged in the rapturous Hallelujahs of eternity!

XXI.

The Last Visit.

WHAT saddening thoughts are associated with our final interview with a Beloved Friend! He was in health when we last met; we little dreamt, in parting, we were to meet no more. Every circumstance of that interview is stored up in the most hallowed chambers of the soul. His last words—his last *look*—his last smile—they live there in undying memorial! Such was now the case with the disciples. They had their last walk together with their beloved Master. Ere another sun goes down over the western hills of Jerusalem He will have returned from His consummated Work to the bosom of His Father!

And what is the spot which he selects as the place of Ascension?—What the favoured height or valley that is to listen to His farewell words?

Still it is BETHANY—the loved home of cherished friendship, where, so lately, hours of anticipated anguish had been mitigated and soothed. The spot which, above all others, had been witness to His tears and His Omnipotence, is selected as that *from* which, or *near* to which, He is to bid adieu to his sorrowing Church on earth. Although there seem to be no special reasons for this selection, we cannot think it was altogether undesigned or insignificant. Our Lord was still MAN—participating in every tender feeling of our common nature; and just as many are known in life to express a partiality for the place of their departure, where they would desire their last hours to be spent, or for the sepulchre or churchyard where they would prefer their ashes to be laid;—so may we not imagine the Saviour, reverting in these, His last hours, to the hallowed memories of that hallowed village, wishful that He might ascend to heaven within view, at least, of the spot He loved so well?

Whether this be the true explanation or no, we are called now to follow Him, in thought, from His concluding visit in Jerusalem to the scene of Ascension. We may imagine it, in all likelihood,

the early dawn of day. The grey mists of morning were still hovering over the Jehoshaphat valley, as for the last time he descended the well-known path. He must have crossed the brook KEDRON —that brook which had so oft before murmured in His ear during night-seasons of deep sorrow—He must have passed by GETHSEMANE—the thick Olives pendant with dew, the shadows of early day still brooding over them. Their gloomy vistas must have recalled terrible hours, when the sod underneath was moistened with "great drops of blood." Can we dare to imagine His sensations and feelings when passing *now?* Would they not be the same as that of every Christian still, while passing through memories of trial, "It was good for me to be here?" Had He dashed untasted to the ground, the cup which in the depths of that awful solitude He had grasped six weeks before, His work would have been undone—a world yet unsaved! But He shrunk not from that baptism of blood and suffering. Gethsemane can now be gazed upon as a place of triumph. His Omniscient eye, as He now skirts its precincts, connects its awful struggles with the Redemp-

tion and joy of ransomed myriads through all eternity. He has the first realising earnest of the prophet's words,—Seeing of the fruit of "the travail of His soul," He is "satisfied."

But vain is it to conjecture feelings and emotions unrecorded. It would, doubtless, not be on Himself the Great Redeemer would, in these waning hours of earthly communion, chiefly dwell. They would rather be occupied in preparing the hearts of the sorrowful band around Him for His approaching departure. He would unfold to them the glorious conquests which, in His name, they were on earth to achieve, as His standard-bearers and apostles, and the ineffable bliss awaiting them in that Heaven whither He was about to ascend as their Forerunner and Precursor. It must indeed have been to them a season of severe and bitter trial! They had in their hearts a full and tender impression—a gushing recollection of three years' unvarying kindness and affection—sorrows soothed—burdens eased—ingratitude overlooked—treachery forgiven. Many others they could only think of in connexion with altered tones and changed affection. *He* was *ever the same!* But the sad

day *has* really come when they are to be parted for *time!* No more tender counsels in difficulty, —no more gentle rebukes in waywardness,—no more joyous surprises, as on the shores of Tiberias, or the road to Emmaus, when, with joyful lips, they would exclaim,—"It is the Lord!" This dream of blissful intercourse, like a meteor-flash, was about to be quenched in darkness. Their Lord was to depart, and long, long centuries were to elapse ere His gracious face was to be seen again!

Whether, in this ever-memorable walk to the place of Ascension, the Adorable Redeemer visited the village of Bethany, we cannot tell. It is possible—it is *more* than possible—He may have honoured the home of Lazarus with a farewell benediction; but this we can only conjecture. All the notice we have regarding it is: that "He led them out as far as to Bethany;" that He there lifted up His hands and blessed them; and was from thence taken up to Heaven.* Honoured hamlet!

* "On the wild uplands," says Mr Stanley, "which immediately overhangs the village, He finally withdrew from the eyes of His disciples, in a seclusion which, perhaps, could nowhere else be found so near the stir of a mighty city, the long ridge of Olivet screening those

thus to be alone mentioned in connexion with the closing scene in this mighty drama! He selected not *Bethlehem*, where angel hosts had chanted His praise; nor *Tabor*, where celestial beings had hovered around Him in homage; nor *Calvary*, where riven rocks and bursting grave-stones had proclaimed His deity; nor the *Temple-court*, in all its sumptuous glory, where for ages His own Shekinah had blazed in mystic splendour; but He hallows afresh the name of a lowly *Village;* He consecrates a Home of love. BETHANY is the last spot

hills, and those hills the village beneath them, from all sight or sound of the city behind; the view opening only on the wide waste of desert rocks, and ever-descending valleys, into the depths of the distant Jordan and its mysterious lake. At this point the last interview took place. He led them out as far as to Bethany. The appropriateness of the whole scene presents a singular contrast to the inappropriateness of that fixed by a later fancy, 'Seeking for a sign' on the broad top of the mountain, out of sight of Bethany, and in full sight of Jerusalem, and thus an equal contradiction to the letter and the spirit of the Gospel narrative."—P. 192.

The same writer, in another place (p. 450), says, "Even if the evangelist had been less explicit in stating that He led them out 'as far as to Bethany,' the secluded hills (that especially to which Tobler assigns the name of Djebel Sajach) which overhang that village on the eastern slope of Olivet, are evidently as appropriate to the whole tenor of the narrative, as the startling, the almost offensive publicity of the traditional spot, in the full view of the whole city of Jerusalem, is wholly inappropriate, and (in the absence, as it now appears, of even traditional support) wholly untenable."

which lingers on His view, as the cloud comes down and receives Him out of sight.

Let us gather for a little in imagination on this sacred ground. Let us note a few of the interesting thoughts which cluster around it, and listen to the Saviour's farewell themes of converse there with His beloved disciples.

(1.) He cheers their hearts with the promised baptism of the Holy Ghost.—"John," He had said, a few hours before, at His last meeting with them in Jerusalem, "truly baptized with water; but ye shall be baptized with the Holy Ghost not many days hence."* He, moreover, enjoined them to linger in the Holy City, and wait this "promise of the Father" which "they had heard of Him;" and now, once more, when on the eve of Ascension, He speaks of the coming of the same Holy Ghost to qualify them for their future work.†

This, we know, was the great topic of consolation with which He had often before soothed their hearts at the thought of parting. *He* was to leave them;—but an Almighty *Paraclete* or *Comforter* was

* Acts i. 5. † Acts i. 8.

to take His place, whose gracious presence would more than compensate for the withdrawal of His own. For when, on the intimation of His coming departure, He observed that sorrow was filling their hearts—"It is expedient," said He, "for you that I go away: for if I go not away, the Comforter will not come unto you; but if I depart, I will send him unto you."*

Now that the anticipated hour is come, He reverts to the same omnipotent ground of comfort;—that this Divine Enlightener, Cheerer, Sanctifier, would fill up the gap His own withdrawal would make. They were about to enter on a new dispensation—the dispensation of the SPIRIT—and the approaching Pentecost was to give them a pledge and earnest of His mighty agency in the conversion of souls.

Jesus, our adorable Lord, has ascended to "His Father and our Father—to His God and our God!" We, like the disciples, have to mourn the denial of His personal presence. His Church is left widowed and lonely by reason of His departure. But have we known, in our experience, the

* John xvi. 7.

value of the great compensating boon here spoken of? Have we known, in the midst of our weakness and wants, our griefs and sorrows, the power and grace of the promised Paraclete? It is to be feared we do not realise or value His blessed agency as we ought. To what is much of the deadness, and dullness, and languor of our frames to be traced—the poverty of our faith, the lukewarmness of our love, the coldness of our Sabbath services, the little hold and influence of divine things upon us? Is it not to the feeble realisation of the quickening, life-giving power of this Divine Agent? "It is the Spirit that quickeneth." Church of the living God! if you would awake from your slumber and apathy; if you would exhibit among your members more faithfulness, more zeal, more love, more unselfishness, more union—if you would buckle on your armour for fresh conquests in the outlying wastes of heathenism, it will be by a fresh baptism of the Holy Ghost! Another Pentecost will usher in the Millennial morning. The showers of His benign influences will form the prelude to the world's great Spiritual Harvest. "Pray ye, then, the Lord of the Har-

vest," that His Spirit may "come down like rain upon the mown grass, and as showers that water the earth," and that the promise regarding the latter-day glory may be fulfilled—"I will pour down My Spirit upon all flesh." Or would you have Jesus made more precious to your *own* soul? Would you see more of His matchless excellences,—the glories of His person and work,—His suitableness and adaptation to all the wants and weaknesses, the sorrows and temptations, of your tried and tempted natures. Pray for this gracious Unfolder of the Saviour's character. This is one of His most precious offices—as the *Revealer* of Jesus. "He shall glorify *Me;* for He shall receive of *Mine*, and shall shew it unto you!" *

(2.) Another theme of Christ's converse, when within sight of Bethany, was *the nature of His Kingdom*—"Lord, wilt thou at this time restore again the kingdom of Israel?" was the inquiry of the disciples. "And he said unto them, It is not for you to know the times or the seasons which the Father hath put in His own power." †

The thoughts of His followers were clinging to

* John xvi. 14. † Acts i. 6, 7.

the last to the dream of earthly sovereignty. How difficult it is to get even the renewed and regenerated mind to understand and realise Heavenly things, and to wean it from what is of the earth earthy! He checks their presumption—He tells them these are questions which they may not pry into. There is to be no present fulfilment of these visions of millennial glory. That day and that hour are to be wrapt in unrevealed and impenetrable secrecy. The Church may not attempt rashly and inquisitively to lift the veil. She is not to know the *time* of the Saviour's appearing, that she may live every day in the frame she would wish to be found in when the cry shall be heard, "Behold the Bridegroom cometh." The apostolic band are, in the first instance, to be cross-bearers, as He their Master was,—witnesses to His sufferings, earthen vessels, defamed, persecuted, reviled, —before they become partakers of His purchased happiness and bliss!

Nevertheless, it was a grand and glorious mission He sketched out for them. How worthy of HIMSELF—of his loving, forgiving, unselfish Spirit—was the opening clause in that wondrous

Missionary Charter He then put into their hai
Even at the moment when all the memory
Jewish ingratitude was fresh on His heart, l
inserts a wondrous provision of mercy ai
grace. They were to proclaim His name throug
the wide world; but was JERUSALEM (the scen
of His ignominy) to form an exception? Nay,
rather they were to *begin there!* The Gospel-
Trumpet was to be sounded in its streets. The
assassins of Gethsemane, the murderers of Calvary
were to listen to the first offers of pardon and
reconciliation—"And He said unto them . . .
that repentance and remission of sins should be
preached in His name among all nations, *beginning*
at *Jerusalem!*" Precious warrant, surely, are these
words to "the chief of sinners" to repair to this
gracious Saviour. If even for "*the Jerusalem*
sinner" there is mercy, can there be ground for
one human being to despair?

But "*beginning*" at Jerusalem, the Gospel
Commission did not *end* there? It was to
embrace, first, "Judea," then "Samaria," then
"the uttermost parts of the earth."* The

* Acts i. 8.

ascending Redeemer's expansive heart took in with a vast sweep the wide circle of humanity. From the elevated ridge of Olivet, on which He now stood with the arrested group around Him, He might tell them to gaze, in thought at least, far north beyond the Cedar Heights of Lebanon and Hermon;—Southward to the desert and the Isles of the Ocean;—Westward to the fair lands washed by the Great Sea;—Eastward across the palm-trees of Bethany and the chain of Moabite mountains on unexplored continents, where heathenism still revelled in its rites and orgies of impurity and blood. With Palestine as their centre and starting-point, the vast World was to be their circumference. The Gospel was to be preached "as a witness to all nations." The Great Mission-Angel was to "fly through the midst of Heaven," having its everlasting truths to "preach to every nation, and kindred, and tongue, and people."

Are *we* faithfully fulfilling our Lord's farewell Apostolic Commission? As members of the Church of God, component parts of the Royal Priesthood, are we doing what lies in our power,

that His name, and doctrine, and salvation, be proclaimed to the uttermost parts of the earth? Or is it so, that we are looking coldly, suspiciously, indifferently on the Church's efforts in the cause of Missions, suffering her funds to fail, and her schemes to languish, and her devoted servants to sink in discouragement? Or rather, are we prepared to incur the responsibility of heathen souls, through our neglect, passing hour by hour into eternity, with a Saviour's name unheard of, and a Saviour's love unknown? Go to the Rocky ridge above BETHANY, and listen to the parting injunction of our Great Master. His last words, ere the cloud received Him to glory, were *Missionary* words, a *Missionary* appeal, a pleading for the Gospel being sent to heathen shores. Ah! *our own Britain* was then among the number! If the Apostolic Company had in these days, like many among ourselves, refused, on the ground of the *home-heathen* in Judea, to send any of their band abroad, where would *we* have been at this hour? With our Druids' altars, our bloody sacrifices, our cruel rites! But their best and noblest were commissioned to speed from port to port in the Medi-

terranean and the Isles of the Gentiles, with the Gospel errand on their lips, and the blessing of God on their labours! All honour to these leal-hearted men, who, in spite of national and hereditary prejudices, implicitly followed the will of their Lord and Master, who had given to them, as He has given to us, a great Missionary motto—"THE FIELD IS THE WORLD!"

And now His themes of instruction and comfort are over—He is about to Ascend! The symbolic cloud—(invariable emblem of Deity)—comes down to conduct Him to His throne. What a moment was that! Glory in view—the hallelujahs of angels floating in His ear—the air thronged with celestial hosts waiting as His retinue to bear Him upwards;—all heaven in eager expectancy for her returning Lord. And yet—how is He employed? Is the world, that had so disowned Him, disowned now in return? Are the disciples, who have so oft deserted Him, now deserted in return?—their name forgotten in the thought of the loftier spirits who are to gather around Him in the skies? Nay, His every thought is centered on the weeping band

of earth. "He lifted up his hands and blessed them!"* His last words are those of mercy—His last act is outstretching His arms to bless! It was an act replete with meaning to the Church of God in every age. Jesus, when He was last seen on earth, wore no terror on His lips—but He left our world pouring a benediction on His redeemed people.

There is something, moreover, significant in the recorded fact that "WHILE He blessed them, He was parted from them!" The Benediction was unfinished when the cloud bore Him away! As they gazed upwards and upwards till that glorious form was diminishing in the blue sky above, still His hands were extended;—the last dim vision which lingered on their memories was the True High Priest blessing the representative Israel of God! It would seem as if He wished to indicate that the act begun on earth was to be carried on and perpetuated in heaven—that though parted from them, His outstretched arms would still plead for them on the Throne. His *voice* could no longer

* Luke xxiv. 50.

be heard—but His blessing still would continue to descend till He came again!

Wondrous close to a wondrous life! We have traversed in thought many other memorials of Bethany. We have stood by the gate where Martha met her Lord—the silent sepulchre which listened to the voice of Omnipotence—the holy home where friendship was realised such as earth never before or since beheld. But surely not less sacred or hallowed than any of these is the scene presented on the green ridge rising to the west of the village, overlooking its groves of palm. Before superstition ventured to raise its cumbrous monument on the heights of Olivet, may we not think of the scene of the Ascension, rather in connexion with three *living* Temples? May we not think of it as oft and again visited by Martha, and Mary, and Lazarus? May we not well imagine it would form a hallowed retirement for solemn meditation! Amid more sorrowful thoughts, connected with their Lord's absence from them, would they not there often muse in holy joy over the now fulfilled prophetic strains of their minstrel King?—"Thou hast ascended on high, Thou hast led captivity

captive: Thou hast received gifts for men; yea, *for* the rebellious also, that the LORD God might dwell among *them*." *

Do *we* love also to linger in spirit on that spot, and listen to that benediction?—"Blessed," we read, "are they that know the joyful sound." In these words there is a beautiful allusion to the sound of the pendant bells on the vestment of the High Priest in the Jewish temple of old. When the assembled multitudes in the outer court heard their music within the holiest of all, it conveyed the assurance that the High Priest was there, actively engaged in his official duties—sprinkling the Mercy Seat with blood, and pleading for the nation. They felt "blessedness" in hearing and *knowing* "that joyful sound." Beautiful type of JESUS the Great High Priest within the veil! We seem, as we behold Him standing on the crest of Olivet, to listen to the first note of these gladsome chimes. He leaves His Church proclaiming nothing but blessings. As He rises upwards, and the diminishing cloud recedes from sight, still the music of benediction seems to float on the calm

* Ps. lxviii. 18.

morning air. The Golden Bells are sounding—and though the celestial notes cease, it is only distance which renders them inaudible. They are still pendant at His Royal Priestly robes, telling us that still He intercedes! Oh, let us now hear His benediction! Let the comforting thought follow us wherever we go—"*Jesus is pleading for me within the Veil.*" He left this world *blessing*—He is engaged in *blessing* still. "HE EVER LIVETH TO MAKE INTERCESSION FOR US."

XXII.

Angelic Comforters.

THE Lord has ascended. The disciples are left alone in wondering amazement. The bright cloud which formed His chariot had swept majestically upwards—till (dimming on their view) the gates of heaven closed on Him, who, a moment before, had been breathing upon them farewell benedictions of peace and love. Are they to be left alone? Terrible must have been the feeling of solitude on that lone mountain-ridge, as the voice of mingled Omnipotence and Love was hushed for all time. "Alone, but yet *not* alone!" While their eyes are still directed up to the spot where they got the last glimpse of the vanishing cloud—transfixed there in speechless Sorrow, lo! "two men stood by them in shining vestures!" The Saviour has departed; the sunshine of His own loving

presence is gone—but He leaves them not unsolaced. The vision of the patriarch is again realised. When, like that weary pilgrim, dejected, disconsolate, and sad—a ladder of comfort is stretched down from the heaven on which they gaze, and "the Angels of God are ascending and descending on it!"

Ah! whenever the Lord removes one comfort, He is ready to supply another. He Himself leaves His disciples—but no sooner *does* He leave, than Angels come and minister to them; and this is immediately followed by a mightier than Angelic Comforter—even the fulfilled promise of the Holy Spirit. "If I go not away, the Comforter will not come unto you, but if I depart, I will send Him unto you." How graciously does Jesus thus adapt Himself to the character and trials of His people! What compensations He gives when they are suffering tribulation! One blessing is taken away—it is only that they may be brought more fully to value others which remain. A beloved friend is removed by death—the household is saddened at the stroke—its aching hearts are smitten and withered like the grass—but new

spiritual consolations are imparted, unknown before —brighter manifestations of the Saviour's grace and mercy are vouchsafed—the Promises of God, like the ministering angels on Mount Olivet, are sent to hover around these stricken spirits. They are made to sing of "mercy" in the midst of "judgment!"

Is Hagar in the desert? There is a fountain (though at first unseen) at her side! Is Elijah trembling in the dark cave of Horeb? There is a "still small voice" amid the long-drawn breath of the tempest, and earthquake, and storm;—"The Lord is *there!*" Be assured He will never leave nor forsake any that truly seek Him. To all desolate ones, who, like the Olivet disciples, lift the steadfast eye of faith heavenwards, bending like them in the silent attitude of resignation and faith —God will send comfort. He will have his angels ready to wipe weeping eyes and soothe sorrowful hearts.

We cannot grapple with this doctrine. We who are creatures of sense, who are cognisant through a corporeal organism only of what is tangible and material, cannot grasp what relates to the immate-

rial, invisible, spiritual. We strive in vain to realise the truth of Angelic Beings compassing our earthly path, joying with us in our joys—aiding us in our perplexities, and mingling their accents of comfort with us in our seasons of sorrow. But though mysteriously invisible, we believe there are hosts of these blessed messengers thronging around, profoundly interested in all that concerns us—"bearing us up in all our ways"—following us, as Jacob saw them, step by step up the ladder of salvation, till we reach our thrones and our crowns! Angelic agency is no mere gorgeous dream of inspired poetry—no mere symbolic way of stating the doctrine of Divine Providence, and the peculiar care which God takes of His Church and people. The Bible gives us too many positive statements on the subject to permit a figurative interpretation. These bright and holy Beings are there represented as having witnessed all along with profound interest the gradual unfolding of the plan of salvation—from the hour when, at creation's birth, the morning stars sang together, and all the Sons of God shouted for joy—onwards to the eventful night

when they met over the plains of Bethlehem and chanted a responsive anthem at the advent of the Prince of Peace! Now that Redemption is completed—they have gathered once more on Olivet to form a royal retinue to conduct their Lord to His crown—to summon the gates of Heaven to "lift up their heads" that "the King of Glory may enter in." If God, in bringing in His first-begotten into the world, said, "Let all the angels of God worship Him;" much more, when His work is done, and the moral Conqueror, laden with the spoils of victory, is about to return to His throne, may we expect that "the chariots of God" ("twenty thousand, even thousands of angels") are waiting to grace His triumph.

Nor were they merely employed on earth as His servants and attendants during the period of His incarnation—leaving our world, when *He* left it, to "serve him day and night in His heavenly temple." A portion of this glorious bodyguard we find now, at the hour of Ascension, left behind to certify to the disciples and the Church in every age, that Angels were still to continue their loving watchfulness and interest over the

Pilgrims in a Pilgrim world—still to be sent forth on errands of mercy to "minister to them who are heirs of salvation!"

Is it the House of God—the gates of Zion—the Holy place of Solemnities? The scene now before us on Mount Olivet forms a miniature picture of what takes place Sabbath after Sabbath in every meeting of Christian disciples. As we are assembled like the apostles in our Sanctuary—looking upwards to Heaven, there are glorious Spirits, we may well believe, clustering around us—hovering in silence over our assembly—engaged, it may be, in unseen conflict with the emissaries of evil—assisting us in our prayers—joining with us in our praises—waiting to waft these upwards, and get them perfumed with the incense of the Saviour's merits.

Nor is it the Sanctuary alone they overshadow with their wings of light. The lowliest homestead of the believer is oftentimes made a MAHANAIM ("a Host"). The dwellers in the world's thousand Bethany-homes of simple faith and lowly love are "entertaining angels unawares." In the hour of sickness they are there unseen to smooth

our pillow. In the hour of danger they are at hand to "shut the lions' mouths." In the hour of bereavement they are employed bringing messages of solace from the Intercessor within the veil, and enabling us to "glorify God in the fires." In the hour of death they are waiting to lend their wings to the Immortal tenant as it bursts its earthly coil. Oh, if the *return* of the Repentant Sinner be to them an hour of joyous jubilee;—if their songs of triumph greet the Believer *justified;*—what must it be to exult over the gladsome consummation—the Believer *glorified;* to be engaged on the Great Day as Reapers at the ingathering of the sheaves into the heavenly garner—throwing open, at the bidding of their Great Lord, the Golden Portals that the ransomed millions may enter in!

"Oh never, till the clouds of time
Have vanish'd from the ken of man,
And he from yonder heaven sublime
Look back where mystic life began,
Will gather'd saints in glory know
What blessings men to angels owe.

"This earth is but a thorny wild,
A tangled maze where griefs abound,
By sorrow vex'd, by sin defiled,
Where foes and friends our walk surround;
But does not God in mercy say,
Angelic guardians line the way?

"Sickness and woe perchance may have
Ethereal hosts whom none perceive,
Whose golden wings around us wave
When all alone men seem to grieve;
But while we sigh or shed the tear,
Their sympathies may linger near.

"When gracious beams of holy light
From heaven's half-open'd portals play,
And from our scene of suffering night
Melts nigh its haunted gloom away;
Each doubt perchance some angel sees,
And hovers o'er our bended knees!

"And when at length this wearied life
Of toil and danger breathes its last,
Or ere the flesh, with parting strife,
Is down to clay and coldness cast;
The struggling soul can learn the story,
How angels waft the blest to glory." *

But, after all, can Angels really impart comfort? They cannot. They are but servants and delegates of a Mightier than they. Like all ministers and messengers, if they can dry a human tear and soothe a human sorrow, it is by pointing, not to themselves, but to their glorious and glorified Lord. What was their message now? Was it, "We are come to supply the place of your Ascended Redeemer—we are henceforth to be your appointed helpers—the objects of your faith, and hope, and

* Montgomery.

confidence, in the house of your pilgrimage?" No! The eyes of the disciples are gazing upwards and heavenwards. The Angels tell them not in anywise to alter the direction of their thoughts and affections. They are musing (as in vain they still wistfully look for any relic of the chariot-cloud) on "*Jesus only.*" They are to think of "*Him only*" still! The Celestial Visitants seem to say, "Ye men of Galilee, *we* cannot comfort you; —*we* would prove but poor solaces and compensations for the Adorable Saviour who has left you. *We* come not to take His place—but to speak to you still regarding Him. He has left you! but it is only for a season; and better than this, although He has left you, He loves you as much as ever. Even in that distant glory to which He has sped His way, His heart is unchanged and unchangeable—His name is "Jesus Christ, the same yesterday, and to-day, and for ever."

Here then was their first theme of comfort. It was the NAME of *Jesus*. That "name of their Lord" was still to be their "strong tower!" Oh, there is something touchingly beautiful about this angelic address. What a simple but sublime

antidote for these stricken Spirits, "THAT SAME JESUS." "That *same* Jesus,"—He who laid His infant head on the manger at Bethlehem—He who walked on the Sea of Tiberias, and hushed its angry waves—He who spoke comfort to a stricken spirit at the well of Sychar, and at the gate of Nain—He who, in yonder palm-clad village sleeping in quiet loveliness at their feet, soothed the pangs of deeply afflicted hearts, and made death itself yield its prey—He who had first shed His tears and then His blood over the city He loved—He who, so freely forgave, so meekly suffered, so willingly died! "THAT SAME JESUS" was still on High! The Brother's form was still there! The Kinsman-Redeemer's sympathy was still there! Though all Heaven was then doing Him homage—though He had exchanged the chilling ingratitude of earth for the glories of an unsullied world of purity and love—yet nothing could blot out from His heart the names of those whom He had still left for a little season behind, to be bearers of His cross before they became sharers of His crown!

What a comfort, amid all earth's vicissitudes

and changes, this motto-verse! *Earth may* change. Since the Lord ascended, earth *has* changed! There are "Written rocks"—manifold more than those of Sinai—that bear engraven on their furrowed brows, "The world passeth away." Ocean's old shores have transgressed their boundaries—kingdoms have risen and fallen—thronging cities have sprung up amid desert wastes—and proud capitals have been levelled with the dust. *Friends* may change; our very lot and circumstances, in spite of ourselves, may change. Our fondly planned schemes and cherished hopes may vanish into thin air, and the *place* that now knows us know us no more! But there is ONE that changeth not—a Rock which stands immutable amid all the ceaseless heavings and commotions of this mortal life—and that Rock is Christ!

Has he ever failed us? Ask the *tried* Christian. Ask the *aged* Christian. That gray-haired believer may be like a solitary oak in the forest—all his compeers cut down—tempest after tempest has sighed and swept amid the branches—tree by tree has succumbed to the blast—there may be nothing but wreck and ruin and devastation all

around. Friend after friend has departed; some have *altered* towards him; kindness may have given way to alien looks and estranged affection; others are removed by *distance*—old familiar faces and scenes have given place to new ones;—others have been called away to the silent grave—sleeping quiet and still in "the narrow house appointed for all living." That aged lonely Christian can clasp his withered hands, and exclaim, through his tears, "*But* THOU art the same, and *Thy* years shall have no end." "Heart and flesh do faint and fail, but God is the strength of my heart, and my portion for ever."

"My God, I thank thee, Thou dost care for me;
I am content rejoicing to go on,
Even when my home seems very far away;
And over grief, and aching emptiness,
And fading hopes a higher joy ariseth.
In nightliest hours one lonely spot is bright,
High over head, through folds and folds of space;
It is the earnest star of all my heavens,
And tremulous in the deep-well of my being,
It's image answers. * * * * I WILL THINK OF JESUS."*

But, in addition to the name and nature of Jesus the Angels added a promise of comfort regarding

* "Within and Without."

Him. "He shall *so come* in like manner as ye have seen Him go into heaven."* *Jesus shall come again!*

When a beloved brother or friend whom we love is taken from us by death, how cheered we are by the thought of rejoining him in a brighter and better world. Even in earthly separations, how cheering the prospect of those severed by oceans and continents meeting once more in the flesh—the associations of youth renewed and perpetuated—and the long-severed links of friendship welded and cemented again! What must be, to the bereft and lonely Christian, the thought of being restored, and that *for ever*, to his long-absent Saviour? *Jesus shall come again!*—it is the Church's "blessed hope"—the day when her weeds and robes of ashen sorrow shall be laid for ever aside, and she shall "enter into the joy of her Lord?" It is His return, too, in a glorified manhood. That *same Jesus shall* so *come!* Yes! "*so* come," in the very body with which He bade the sorrowing eleven that sad farewell! He left them with His hands extended, and with blessings on His lips.

* Acts i. 11.

He will return in the same attitude to greet His expectant Church, with the words, "Come, *ye blessed* of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world."

And if it be a comforting thought, "Jesus *still* the *same*, now seated on the Mediatorial throne,"—equally comforting surely is the prospect that it will be in all the unchanging and undying sympathies of His exalted humanity, that He will come again as Judge. "God hath appointed a day in which He will judge the world in righteousness by *that* MAN whom he hath ordained." He shall come, not arrayed in the stern magnificence of Godhead! As we behold Him, we need not crouch in terror at His approach. *Humanity* will soften the awe which Deity would inspire. We can rejoice with Job not only that our Kinsman Redeemer "*liveth*," but that, *as* our Kinsman Redeemer, "He shall stand at the latter day upon the earth!"

Would that we more constantly lived under the realising power of this elevating thought—"Soon my Lord will come!" "Of the times and the seasons ye need not that I write unto you." It is not for us to dogmatize on the unrevealed period

of the "glorious appearing." The millennial trumpet may in all probability sound over our slumbering dust—the millennial sun shine on the turf which may for centuries have covered our graves!—But *who*, on the other hand, dare venture to question the *possibility* of the nearer alternative?—that the Judge may be "standing before the door"—the shadow of the Advent Throne even now projected on an unthinking and unbelieving world! "He that *shall* come *will* come, and will not tarry!"—Although it be true that eighteen hundred years have elapsed since that utterance was made, and still no gleam of the coming morning streaks the horizon—although the calculations and longing expectations of the Church have hitherto only issued in successive disappointments, yet the hour *is* nearing! As grain by grain drops in Time's sand-glass, it gives new significance and truthfulness to the Divine monition—"Behold, I come quickly!"

Ah! if He *may* come *soon*—if He MUST come at some time, how shall I meet Him? Will it be with joy? Am I shaping my course in life—my plans—my schemes—my wishes with what I feel would be in accordance with His will? Am I

conscious of doing nothing that would lead me to be ashamed before Him at His coming? It would save many a perplexity—it would soothe many a heart-ache, and dry many a tear—if we were to make this great culminating event in the world's history, with all its elevating motives, more our guide and regulator than we do;—living each day, and *all* our days, as if *possibly* the very next hour might disclose "the sign of the Son of Man in the midst of the Heavens!" Not building our nests too fondly here—not too anxious to nestle in creature comforts, but occupying faithfully the talents to be traded on which He has committed to our stewardship; straining the eye of faith, like the mother of Sisera, for His approaching chariot; and amid our griefs, and separations, and sorrows, listening to the sublime inspired antidote—"Stablish your hearts, FOR *the coming of the Lord draweth nigh.*"

Blessed—glorious—happy day! And as His *first* coming was terminated by His Ascension, so will there be a second Ascension at His *second* Advent, with this important difference, however, that, as in the former, He left His Church behind

Him, orphaned and forlorn, to battle in a world of sorrow and sin; in the other, not one unit among the rejoicing myriads, bought with His blood, will He debar from sharing in the splendour of His final entrance within the celestial gates. "The Lord Himself shall descend from heaven with a shout —with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God; and the dead in Christ shall rise first. Then they who are alive and remain, shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air, and so shall we ever be with the Lord."

"We must not stand to gaze too long,
Though on unfolding heaven our gaze we bend;
When lost behind the bright angelic throng,
We see Christ's entering triumph slow ascend.

"No fear but we shall soon behold,
Faster than now it fades, that gleam revive,
When issuing from his cloud of fiery gold,
Our wasted frames feel the true Sun and live.

"Then shall we see Thee as Thou art,
For ever fix'd in no unfruitful gaze,
But such as lifts the new created heart
Age after age in worthier love and praise."

XXIII.

The Disciples' Return.

The time has come when the disciples must leave the crest of Olivet and bend their steps once more to Jerusalem. Ah! most sorrowful thought—most sorrowful pilgrimage! Often, often had it been trodden before with their Lord's voice of love and power sounding in their ears. Often had it proved an Emmaus journey, when their hearts "burned within them as He talked to them by the way and opened unto them the Scriptures." But He is gone!—that voice is now hushed—the well-loved path, worn by His blessed footsteps, and consecrated by His midnight prayers, must be trodden by them alone! Willingly, perhaps, like Peter, on Tabor, would they have tarried on the spot where they last saw His human form, and listened to the music of His voice, just as we still love to revisit some haunt of

hallowed friendship and associate it with His name and words and features of the departed. But they dare not linger. As the disciples of this great and good Master, they dare not remain to indulge in mere sentimental grief, or in vain hopes and expectations of a speedy return. Life is too short—their Apostolic work too solemn and momentous, to suffer them to consume their hours in unavailing sorrow. We may imagine them taking their last look upwards to heaven, and then bending a tearful eye down upon Bethany—its hallowed remembrances all the *more* hallowed, that the vision is now about to pass away for ever! The Angels, too, have sped away, and the eleven pilgrims begin their solitary return back to the city and temple from which the *true* Glory had indeed departed!

And how did they return? What were their feelings as they rose to pursue their way? Had we not been told far otherwise, we should have imagined them to have been those of deep dejection. We should have pictured to ourselves a weary, weeping, troubled band; their countenances shaded with a sorrow too profound for words;—the joyous melodies of that morning hour, all in sad

contrast with those hearts which were bowed down with a bereavement unparalleled in its nature since a weeping world was bedewed with tears! They were going too, as "lambs in the midst of wolves," to the very city where, a few weeks before, their Lord had been crucified,—the disciples of a hated Master, "not knowing the things that might befall *them* there." Could we wonder, if for the moment these aching spirits should have surrendered themselves to mingled feelings of disconsolate grief and terror. But *how different!* Sorrow indeed they *must* have had; but if so, it was counterbalanced and overborne by far other emotions; for of the *sorrow*, the Evangelist says *nothing;* the simple record of this mournful journey is in these words, "They returned to Jerusalem WITH GREAT JOY." Most wonderful, and yet most true! Never did mourner return from a funeral scene—(from laying in the grave his nearest and dearest)—with a heavier sense of an overwhelming loss than did that widowed orphaned band. And yet, lo! they are *joyful!* A sunshine is lighting up their faces. The "Sun of their souls" has set behind the world's horizon. But though vanished

from the eye of sense, His glory and radiance seem still to linger on their spirits, just as the orb of day gilds the lofty mountain-peaks long after his descent. They tread the old footway with elastic step! As Gethsemane, and Kedron, and the Temple-path, are in succession skirted, while "*sorrowful*, they are alway REJOICING." Why is this? It was God Himself fulfilling in their experience His own promise, "*As thy day is, so shall thy strength be.*" He metes out strength IN the day of trial, and FOR the day of trial. When *we* expect nothing but fainting and trembling, sadness and despondency, He whispers His own promise, and makes it good, "My grace is sufficient for thee; for my strength is made perfect in weakness."

Who so faint as these disciples? Think of them in their by-past history, tossed on Gennesaret, cowering with dread in their vessel! Think of them in the Judgment-Hall of Pilate; think of them at the cross! Nothing there but pusillanimity and cowardice. Nay, when our Lord had spoken to them on a former occasion of this same departure, we read that "*sorrow had filled their hearts.*" They could not bear the thought of so

cruel a severance from all they held dear. But see them now—when the sad hour has come—lonely —unbefriended — their Lord hopelessly removed from the *eye of sense;* though but a few days before, they were traitors to their trust—unfaithful in their allegiance—bending, like bruised reeds, before the storm—behold them now, retraversing their way to Jerusalem, not with sorrow, as we might expect, but *with joy.* The Evangelist even notes the extent and measure of the emotion. It was not a mere effort to overbear their sorrow — an outward semblance of reconciliation to their hard fate—but it was a deep fountain of real gladness, welling up from their riven spirits. They returned, he tells us, with "GREAT JOY!"

Oh! the wonders of the *grace of God.* What grace *has* done—what grace *can* do! We speak not of it now under its manifold other and diversified phases,—*converting* grace, and *restraining* grace, and *sanctifying* grace, and *dying* grace. Here we have to do only with *sustaining* and *supporting* grace. But how many Christian disciples, in their Olivets of sorrow, have been able to tell the same experience? How often, when a

believer is stricken down with sore affliction—when the hand of death enters his family—when the treasured life of the dwelling is taken, and he feels in the anticipation of such a blow as if it would smite *him*, too, to the dust, and it were impossible to survive the prostration of all that links him to life—when the tremendous blow *comes*, lo! sustaining grace he never could have *dreamed* of comes along with it. He rises *above* his trial. Underneath him are the Everlasting arms. "The joy of the Lord is his strength!" He treads along life's lonely way *sorrowful*, yet with a "song in the night." Amid earth's separations and sadness, he hears the voice of Jesus, saying, "Lo! I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world."

Oh, trust that Grace still! It is the secret of your spiritual strength. "Not I, not I, but the grace of God that is with me!" You may have to confront "a great fight of afflictions;" but that grace sustaining you, you will be made "more than conquerors." "All men forsook me," said the great Apostle, "*nevertheless*, the LORD stood with me, and strengthened me, and I was delivered out of the mouth of the lion." "And God is

able to make *all* grace abound toward YOU; that ye, always having *all-sufficiency* in *all things*, may abound to every good work." You have found Him faithful in the past;—trust Him in the future. Cast all your cares, and each care, as it arises, on Him, saying, in childlike faith, "Undertake Thou for me!" Then, then, in your very night-seasons, "His song will be with you." The Mount of your trial—the mournful, desolate, solitary, rugged path you tread, will be carpeted with love, fringed with mercy, and earth's darkest future will grow bright as you listen to a voice stealing from the upper sanctuary, "I will come again and receive you unto Myself; that where I am, there ye may be also."

In this scene of the disciples returning to Jerusalem, we are presented with the last picture of the Home of BETHANY. Here the earthly vision is sealed, and we are only left to imagine Martha, and Mary, and Lazarus, when the joyous footfall that had cheered their dwelling could be heard no more, living together in sacred harmony, exulting in "the blessed hope, even the glorious appearing of the Great God their Saviour." *

* Is it lawful to think of Bethany in connexion with the Church

Did they live to survive the destruction of Jerusalem? Did they live to hear the tramp of the Roman legions resounding through their quiet hamlet, and "the abomination of desolation," the imperial eagles desecrating the hallowed ridges of Olivet? Did they often repair to the meetings of the infant Church in Jerusalem, and delight to mingle with the *under* shepherds, when the "*Chief*

of the Future? Are there no foreshadowed glories found in the pages of Holy Writ, which include this lowly village—gilding it with the beams of a Millennial Sun? Is it destined to remain as it now is—a wreck of vanished loveliness? and is the crested ridge above it, which was the scene of the great terminating event of the Incarnation, to be associated with no other august displays of the Redeemer's power and majesty? The following remarkable prediction occurs in the prophet Zechariah:—"*And his feet shall stand in that day upon the mount of Olives, which is before Jerusalem on the east, and the mount of Olives shall cleave in the midst thereof toward the east and toward the west, and there shall be a very great valley; and half of the mountain shall remove toward the north, and half of it toward the south.*" Zech. xiv. 4. Were we of the number of those—(perhaps some who read these pages)—who look with firm and joyful confidence to the Personal Reign of the Redeemer on earth, and who in their code of interpretation regarding unfulfilled prophecy, espouse the literal in preference to the spiritual meaning, we might here have an inviting picture presented to us of the BETHANY of the future. The Mount of Olives, by some great physical, or rather supernatural agency, is represented as heaving from its foundations, and parting in twain. The middle summit disappears. The remaining two form the steep sides of a new Valley, which, as it is spoken of as opening at Jerusalem (from Gethsemane), eastwards, the Vista must necessarily terminate with BETHANY; thus

Shepherd" had gone? Or did the venerable company of Apostles love to resort, as their Lord before them, to the old Village of palm-trees, whose every memory was fragrant with their Master's name? All these, and similar questions, we cannot answer. This we know and feel assured of—they are now gathered a holy and happy family in the true Bethany above—*there* never more to listen

connecting the two most memorable spots associated with our Lord's humiliation. "His feet shall stand in that day on *the Mount of Olives*."—The once lowly Saviour again "stands" in power and great glory on the very spot over Bethany from which He formerly ascended. A new highway from the "Village of Palms" is made for His triumphal entrance to the Holy City, while the air resounds with the old welcome—"Rejoice, O daughter of Zion, behold thy King cometh!" If further we turn with the literalists to the majestic Temple-Visions of Ezekiel, we find the front of the newly-erected structure *facing up* this Valley; a new stream—(indeed a mighty river)—gushes down from the temple-colonnade, flowing through the same gorge, and discharging its purifying waters into the Dead Sea. (Verse 8, and Ezekiel xlvii. 1-12; Joel iii. 18. The reader is referred to these passages in full.) From the geographical position, this river must needs, in the course assigned to it, flow nigh to the restored palm-groves of *Bethany*—thus murmuring by scenes consecrated for centuries by the footsteps and tears of a weeping Saviour.

But if we cannot participate in these gorgeous literal picturings, we are abundantly warranted to take the words of the Prophet as delineating the glorious results of the future *restoration* of the Jews to their own Jerusalem. We can think of the City of the Great King raised from her desolation, "her walls salvation, and her gates praise." The Messiah, once rejected, now owned and welcomed—"the children of Zion joyful in their King." We can think of the Valley which is to divide

to the voice of weeping, or hear the tread of the funeral crowd, or the wail of the Mourner!

And soon, too, shall many of us (let us trust) be *there*, to meet them! BETHANY, we have seen, had alike its tears and its joys; so will it be with every spot and every scene in this mingled world. But where the Family of Bethany *now* are, the motto is—"NEVER *sorrowful*, ALWAY *re-*

the Mount of *Olives*—(the mountain bedewed with the memory of the Saviour's *prayers*)—we can think of *that* valley, and the stream which flows through it, as emblematic of spiritual blessings. "ASK of Me," says God, addressing His adorable Son, "and I will give Thee the heathen for thine inheritance." Is not the symbolic answer here given? The Mountain where the Saviour so "oft resorted" to "ask of His Father," is rent in sunder—every barrier to the progress of the truth is now swept away—the living stream of Gospel mercy issues from Zion (or rather, from Him who is the True Temple), that it may flow to the remotest nations of the earth! As it enters the bituminous waters of the Asphaltite Lake, it is represented as curing them of their bitterness (Ezek. xlvii. 8, 9); descriptive of the power of the Gospel, whose living streams, like the symbolic "leaves of the tree of life," are for "the healing of the nations." Then shall the words of Isaiah be fulfilled, "Every valley shall be exalted, and *every mountain and hill shall be made low*, and the crooked shall be made straight, and the rough places plain. And the glory of the Lord shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together." (Isa. xl. 4.) In the prophecy of Zechariah, to which we have just referred, we are told that in that same happy millennial period, the representatives of the world's nations will go up "year by year to worship the King, the Lord of Hosts, and to keep *the feast of Tabernacles*." (Zech. xiv. 16.) Who can tell but this may be a literal revival of the old Hebrew festival, only invested with a new Gospel

joicing!" And, better than all, while they never can be severed from one another, they never can be separated from their Lord. He is no longer now, as formerly at their earthly home, like "a way-

and Christian meaning. "This feast," says a gifted expositor, "is the only unfulfilled one of the great feasts of Israel. *Passover* was fulfilled at Christ's death, and *Pentecost* at the outpouring of the Spirit. But this feast represents the LORD *tabernacling with men*, and is only fulfilled when '*The Lord my God shall come, and all the saints with Thee.*' On the Transfiguration-Hill, Peter, almost unwittingly, set forth this truth. He seemed to mean to say, 'Is not this the true joy of the Feast of Tabernacles? Is not the Lord here?'" If this be so, we can think of the palm-groves of Bethany again bared of their branches;—these waved in triumph as a new and nobler "Hosannah" awakes the ancient echoes of Olivet—"Blessed is He that cometh in the name of the Lord!" As the regenerated children of Abraham build up the waste places in and around Zion, which for ages have been "without inhabitant," and whose names are still dear to them—think we, amid other scenes of hallowed interest, they will not love oftentimes to take the old "Sabbath-day's journey" to the site of "the Home of Mary and her sister Martha." While seated nigh the reputed burial-place, with the Gospel in their hands, reading, through their tears, the story of their fathers' impenitency, and of their Saviour's compassion and sympathy at the grave of His friend, will not a new and impressive truthfulness invest one of the old Bethany utterances, "THEN said the Jews, Behold how He loved him!"

But these, after all, are merely speculative thoughts, on which we can build nothing. We have in these "Memories" to deal with the Bethany of the *past*, not with the imagined Bethany of the *future*. However pleasing, in connexion with the Honoured Village, these thoughts of a Millennial day may be, "nevertheless WE, according to His promise, rather look for *new* Heavens and a *new* Earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness."

faring man that turneth aside to tarry for a night." No Olivet now to remind of farewells. They are "*with Him*," "seeing Him as He is," and that "for ever and ever!"

And if, meanwhile, regarding ourselves, the journey of life has for a little still to be traversed, and the battle of life still to be fought; blessed be God, "we go not a warfare on our own charges." The same grace vouchsafed to the disciples is promised to *us*. *That grace* will enable us to rise superior to all the vicissitudes and changes of the journey. Let us rise from our Olivet-ridge and be going; and though traversing different footpaths to the same Home—be it ours, like the disciples, to reach at last—a holy and happy company—the true Heavenly Jerusalem—"WITH GREAT JOY."

THE END.